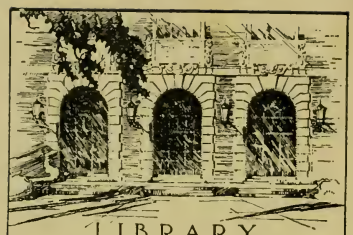

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THREE HUNDRED A YEAR.

VOL. II.

THREE HUNDRED A YEAR.

A Novel.

BY THE HON.

MRS. HENRY WEYLAND CHETWYND.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THREE HUNDRED A YEAR.

CHAPTER I.

"A SOUTHERLY WIND AND A CLOUDY SKY PROCLAIMS IT A HUNTING MORNING."

THE following morning the air resounded with the blowing of horns, the yelping of hounds, and the shouts of men.

Desseldringen was going to hunt.

In the market-place of the little town was assembled all the beauty and fashion of the place.

Several people who had arrived in time for the ball were now mounted for the *chasse*, which was the great one of the year.

The scene was both animated and amusing. The *piqueurs*, in heavy green coats,

with huge flaps edged with scarlet, and armed with large French horns, were bumping about on heavy German horses. Those gentlemen who were rich and ambitious had English grooms to bestride the English horses they could not manage; everywhere was bustle, much talking, and ponderous jokes. At length a move was made.

"Ah ça! où est donc Bobe?" cried one, "Et Tome?" shouted a second.

"Bobe" and "Tome" were found with some little difficulty; they had been exciting much admiration at a short distance by taking preliminary gallops.

Their masters with some effort were got into the saddle, and the horses recognising but too well the change of hand, sidled and fidgeted.

"Ruhig! Tranquille, mon ami!" exclaimed the luckless proprietor, holding on by his reins; "tiens, Bobe, mon ami, que diable va-t-il faire?"

"Bobe," with perfect gravity, loosened

the reins a little and stroked the horse, who sidled and fidgeted all the more as the horns flourished louder than ever, and the noise grew more uproarious.

At last, having wasted an hour, they slowly defiled through the place, followed by a perfect crowd on foot and in every description of carriage, the unhappy owners of "Bobe" and "Tome" getting a little more miserable at each step.

They stop in a rough field outside the town, when M. Pierre Vorwärts, who hunted the hounds, gave innumerable instructions to the *piqueurs*, and the hounds were whipped into a small juniper cover, when *something* was started.

"Allons! mes enfants, allons!" cried M. Pierre, capping on the hounds. "Ah, que c'a sens bon, mes enfants!" he continued, throwing his head back and sniffing with an air of ecstasy.

Helter-skelter went the hunt, across a small open common, bounded by a ditch

which any moderate-sized horse would have taken in his stride; but such an obstacle was to be made the most of.

It was good to see how the bold hunters reined up as they approached, and, turning their horses back, raced them at it, their whips and their voices raised, as they cleared it with a plethoric sigh of relief.

Having achieved this great feat, the owners of "Bobe" and "Tome" changed horses with their grooms, and bumped along contentedly, feeling much happier on the clumsy, heavy horses they were sure of, than on the spirited steeds their grooms invariably hunted when the above little farce had been gone through.

The hounds meantime led a tolerably easy life; they had speed, which the piqueurs' horses had not, and a very few kept sight of them after the first few fields had been got over.

How the Germans took short gallops with a feeling of immense security, and

boasted to each other of the things they would, could, and should have done, except for some unexpected "obstacle" which put it out of their power—how the ditches they had crossed, and the rivers they had waded through, grew wider and deeper, till they assumed at last gigantic and sometimes fabulous proportions, need not be related here.

They returned home early with the greatest satisfaction, exciting great admiration as they passed up the street, and sat down to the annual dinner with the largest appetites possible, and in the highest good humour with themselves, their horses, the hounds, and the hunt.

Herr Hofrath, an annual guest by invitation, was always amused by the feats of daring recounted with such slight variations from year to year, and a little friendly skirmishing always took place between him and the chief boasters of the hunt.

There was one particularly heavy Belgian

baron always present, whose voice was so loud that when he chose to speak no one else could make themselves heard. Herr Hofrath, who rode to the meet, but never attempted hunting, was sitting opposite to him. He listened with apparent interest to the pompous narration of a particularly high fence and deep ditch, which the Baron von Schmeicheln-Katze had jumped as no one else had jumped, and then galloped as only his Satanic Majesty could have galloped; and sighed deeply several times so loudly that at last it attracted the attention of the whole table.

All the hunt looked at him, and inquired what was the matter with him.

"Zahnschmerzen" (toothache), he replied.

Murmurs of pity from every side.

"I am not quite sure if it *is* the toothache," said the Hofrath.

"No, Herr Je; what then?" inquired they.

"I—I rather think it's indigestion," said he, "brought on by cold," looking at the baron as he spoke. "Just at the time M. von Schmeicheln-Katze was crossing that *very* big ditch, I was sitting at the side of it; a horse went over by itself, and a heavy body waded through the water, and splashed me from head to foot. Ja," he continued, shivering, "I got a regular cold bath, and the water was *very* cold. It certainly was very cold; was it not, M. le Baron?"

"Well, I have known it colder," said the baron, not seeing the full force of the admission till a roar of laughter burst from the assembled guests; then muttering an imprecation on the head of Herr Hofrath and every one else, he rose from his seat and rushed from the room.

"I am afraid *he* has got 'Zahnschmerzen!'" said the Hofrath, quietly, as he finished his wine.

CHAPTER II.

LOVE AFFAIRS AGAIN!

Bertha's life glided on calmly enough. She found a great deal to occupy her, and her children were growing daily more companionable. The winter passed over, and at the Maison Brune there was always a good warm dish of soup for those who asked for it. The only person of whom she saw much was Herr Hofrath, and by degrees an idea, that she renounced at first as absurd, grew into conviction.

Herr Hofrath liked Miss Thurston! Bertha was sure of it. It was impossible not to notice, in the first place, that he always called late, so as to find her on her return from Sauerlich. Next she remarked, if accidentally her friend was detained

there, Herr Hofrath was evidently intensely disappointed; and when they were together Bertha also noticed the many little attentions he paid Miss Thurston, and the cordial way in which he approved of and backed her sentiments.

In short, Bertha was certain that Herr Hofrath was "in love," and said so to her husband.

Of course Frank would not believe it. No man ever *does* believe anything of the kind till the proposal is actually made. "Nonsense," he said.

Bertha said no more, but she was positive she was right. One day, when she was sitting in the drawing-room with her friend, she watched her with a large piece of useful work in her hands, but sitting with her eyes looking straight before her, lost in thought.

"Dreaming?" said she, gaily.

Miss Thurston started. "I was thinking," she said, slowly.

"Humph!" said Bertha, "for quite half an hour, let me observe, which, for a sensible, practical person, with a pinafore to finish for a child she dotes upon, and an extremely intelligent companion (of course I am very intelligent), I call——"

"I wanted to tell you something, dear Bertha," said Miss Thurston, "but it seems so extraordinary—so wonderful," she continued, with evident agitation, "that I hardly know how to begin."

Bertha laughed. "Herr Hofrath," she said, mischievously. "You do not mean he has really proposed," she added, hastily, as she watched her friend's colour mounting higher and higher.

Miss Thurston's face answered for her.

"Poor man," exclaimed Bertha, "what a misfortune! how shall we console him? I was afraid he was getting desperate."

"I suppose it sounds very absurd," said Miss Thurston, with a disappointed little laugh.

"Absurd indeed!" echoed Bertha, laughing heartily. "You have not escaped matrimony all these years to marry a German doctor a good many years older than yourself, though he has been a court councillor; and ah! it is very provoking, for he will not come here so often now, and I really like him so very much."

"And supposing I like him too," said Miss Thurston, slowly, and in rather a low voice.

Bertha was more surprised than she liked to show. This was a view of the question that had never occurred to her. She rose, and kneeling down by Miss Thurston's side, she saw that her eyes were full of tears.

"Mary," she exclaimed, "is it really so? Do you really care for him so much?"

"He is so kind; so noble!" said the little woman, smiling through her tears. "He will give me a happy home, I feel sure. Only, if it seems absurd——" she said,

recurring with a little pang to Bertha's exclamation.

"I am so surprised, I hardly know what to say," said Bertha. "He certainly is very good—very noble—as you say; and I have suspected for some time that he liked you very much. But I never thought that you would care about him—I never for a moment pictured to myself the possibility of your marrying a foreigner!"

"I have very few ties to my own country now," said Miss Thurston, sadly; "and after all—absurd or not—I like him!"

"If you really do like him—or rather, *love* him well enough to marry him," said Bertha, kindly, "I cannot say it seems absurd; and yet—do tell me all about it."

"We have always been good friends," said Miss Thurston; "and one day, somehow or other, he began talking to me about his first wife."

"Ah!" said Bertha, "how useful a man's

first wife often is on these occasions! Well?"

"I do not quite remember all he said," continued Miss Thurston; "I was so much surprised, my dear Bertha, when I found that I—no, I mean that he"—and Miss Mary hesitated.

"I suppose he intimated that you might become his consolation," put in Bertha.

"Not quite that," said Miss Mary; "but he did say something very flattering about me, which I really fancied, my dear Bertha, meant nothing; and several days afterwards——"

"Several days afterwards!" ejaculated Bertha. "You dear old thing, what a state of suspense you must have been in!"

"Several days afterwards," continued Miss Mary—"that is, only yesterday—he asked me if I had reflected; in short, my dear Bertha, he did ask me to be his wife. I said I thought I was too old—for I am past forty, my dear child—and I told him

my age. If I was past fifty, he said, it would make no difference; and he pressed me to say if that was my only objection, and so I was forced to say yes, and——"

"Make me a very happy man," said Herr Hofrath, entering in time to finish Miss Thurston's story for her. "Give me joy! Frau Herbert, give me joy! I am only too happy!" and he extended both hands towards her.

"I am quite bewildered!" said Bertha, as she shook hands warmly with him. "I can only lament for myself I cannot congratulate you yet; my selfishness must have time to evaporate."

Miss Thurston was quite overcome.

"She will make such a wonderful little wife," said Herr Hofrath, looking at his *fiancée* with the greatest tenderness. "To think, at my age, of my winning a charming English lady to be my wife! How surprised my German friends will be!"

"I never knitted a pair of stockings in

my life," said Miss Thurston, demurely, "so I have not a chance of being approved of."

"As if knitting was everything," exclaimed the Hofrath; "but indeed, Madame Herbert, I am sorry that my gain will be your loss."

"Never mind me," said Bertha; "but think of the astonishment of all the good people here — what will the world of Desseldringen say?"

"What indeed!" said the Hofrath, comically, as several opinions—all too frank to be pleasantly remembered by the communicators—floated through his mind.

How often remarks, highly personal, and not of a flattering nature, had been made about his *fiancée*, he knew better than any one else! How often her age, her spare, though tidy little figure, even a little nervous movement of her head, had been forced upon his attention, and insisted upon by some of his female friends, who would

now, probably, remember these depreciatory remarks with dismay. Only a short time ago Frau Semmling had pointed out to him that the Engländerinn had some deep design in shortening her petticoats so much. "Don't tell *me*," she said, "that it's national cleanliness and our dirty streets—it's nothing of the kind; it's vanity. I have not lived fifty years in the world without knowing women. I tell you it's vanity. I have always remarked that when a woman has no longer any reason to be proud of her face, her vanity descends into her ankles!'

The Hofrath had smiled and bowed, and told the Frau Semmling that there was no doubt she was the best possible judge on such a point, and the excellent woman had been puzzled, but had made more remarks which she now would probably wish she had left unsaid, and she would probably wonder how far matters had proceeded when these things had been said. On these and other matters of the same kind, the

Hofrath reflected as he stood by his future wife.

Bertha could not help thinking, as she looked at the two, so suddenly invested with a peculiar interest, that there was something very touching in their love. Herr Hofrath, with his tall, upright figure, and fearless look, seemed so fitted to protect and cherish the gentle, timid little woman at his side, whose pale face had gained that bright and settled look that happy love bestows at any age.

CHAPTER III.

FRAU SEMMLING LOSES HER TEMPER.

It was a day or two after the announcement to Bertha, Herr Hofrath and Miss Thurston were walking up and down in the spring sunshine, whilst Bertha was moralizing upon the ups and downs of life in a way that she often did now, when Jeanne, poking her head into the room, warned her of a visitor, and returned in a moment or two with no less a person than the Frau Semmling.

Now it must be understood that the Frau Semmling was a person who always put a high value upon every movement, every action of her life. She did not ring a bell and ask if so-and-so was at home like

an ordinary person. No; she rang the bell and inquired slowly if madame was at home, and receiving an answer in the affirmative, she stood for a moment as if in deep thought, half went in, drew back, and said aloud—"I, perhaps, may spare *one minute* —visiting is a friendly action." Once in the hall she had to take off a pair of clogs made in some particular way, and which (like many private inventions) were of infinitely more complicated and troublesome make than any others. She then took off a short cape, without which she seldom appeared—shook herself, blamed herself aloud for giving up so much time to her neighbours, and walked forwards with a look of virtuous resignation.

Jeanne, who was very quickwitted, saw that upon this occasion Frau Semmling was not quite herself. When she said "yes," that madame was at home, the lady did not hesitate upon the threshold. No; not only did she walk in like an ordinary

woman, but she slipped off her clogs herself, and threw off her cape as if she had been a much less superior person. Jeanne could hardly help nodding her private convictions before Madame Semmling's very face as she ushered her into the drawing-room.

The Frau Semmling was on the whole a clever woman. She spoke a great deal faster than her neighbours, and said everything with an air of great decision, as one would say, "I know I am always in the right, but you may not have the wit to comprehend me;" and this gave her an air of great superiority. Nobody could surpass her, looking at her in the light of a housemother. To see her cut beans for the winter pickling was quite a sight—snip, snip, snip, her knife went like magic!

She knew better than any one else in Desseldringen how many feathers would stuff a *plumeau*, so that it should be neither too hard nor too soft, nor apt to slip off the shivering sleeper from its being a little too

narrow. She could put her whole house to rights, order and help to cook the dinner, make the coffee, and finally dress herself, in much less time than was possible to her less gifted neighbours, and she was always a half stocking ahead of all the world at Desseldringen—qualities so rare and valuable that M. Semmling (who, by the way, was always introduced to any new acquaintance not as being himself, but Madame Semmling's husband) felt he had no business to complain if her superabundant energies occasionally interfered with his comfort. In one of Charles Dickens' novels, a gentleman of the name of Cuttle objected to an insular position on a table while the rest of the room was undergoing a watery submersion, but Frau Semmling would have laughed to scorn any compromise of the kind. No; upon a certain day every week Frau Semmling's doors were all set open, and beginning with the top story, pailful after pailful of water was dashed upon the polished floors;

the maid clattered about in her wooden sabots, armed with a huge mop, and excited to feats of great daring by her mistress's cries, "Lischen! here, girl; see to it; spare not thy strength!—in this corner—ah, so!—good!—now under that schrank—that's right; rub, my girl, rub—that's heavenly!—now this way!" Then the river was sent flying down the stairs—the same process, the same cries going on till every room, passage, and stair had been completely deluged, when the water was triumphantly sent flying out through the front door, down the open gutter in the street.

The floors relieved of every particle of dust dried almost immediately, and they were then ciréed and rubbed till they shone like looking-glasses; but it can be believed that during this process any one anxious to avoid a wetting absented himself. The only misfortune connected with the proceeding was, that if things had gone wrong with Frau Semmling, she felt it a relief to her

mind to embark immediately on the washing and cleaning, and M. Semmling owned to himself (though sure he never suggested such a thing to other people) that it was a little hard that after having been forced to absent himself the whole of Saturday, he should find that owing to an imaginary press of business towards the end of the week, the succeeding Monday was again fixed upon for the operation, and that when he arrived at home after his daily labours in the university in which he held his professorship, he should be confronted with mops and rivers he had fancied laid aside for the next few days. Another fault Madame Semmling had, which was the cause of a good deal of grief to her husband. She had some excellent recipes for making dishes such as the German soul loves. Well, it would chance that she would take a fit of economy at the moment of putting the ingredients together, which affected the whole thing. For instance, say

she was making a pudding, and she had to put in so many eggs, so much butter, so much sugar, &c., she would say to herself—"Ah! the excellent sugar, it is so sweet. I will not put in the whole quantity named, it would very likely make it too sweet. True, such a quantity *is* named, but such sweet sugar can never have been contemplated; I will only put in half." So she would say of the butter, also of the eggs, so that her pudding would become a *very* plain pudding indeed, and M. Semmling would say very meekly—"Lischen has not boiled this enough—it is very heavy;" and Madame Semmling would say, "It is very good, and better for your health than if it was richer," a consolation which, alas! experience never verified.

This was the lady who now appeared in Bertha's drawing-room; the truth was that certain reports about the Herr Hofrath had come to her ears, and she was quite determined to go and judge for herself. She

flattered herself that without betraying her intentions she should be able to find out the truth, and with much diplomacy she began to discuss with Bertha matters relating to everything in Desseldringen except the reports alluded to. While so engaged the quicksighted frau caught sight of the betrothed, and read at a glance the explanation of Herr Hofrath's smile—that smile that had so disquieted her. For a moment even the dauntless spirit of the Frau Semmling was taken aback; but she took up her position directly. "Ah!" she said, "there is the Herr Hofrath and Miss Thurston;" and before Bertha knew what she was about, she had walked out through the window, and approached them with a rapid step.

"Good day, Herr Hofrath," she said, "I thought I should find you here, and Miss Thurston too. I hope you are as well as you look. You do not look as if you required medical advice; but, perhaps,

he has been giving you some all the same!"

"I have been so presumptuous as to offer some advice to Miss Thurston," answered the Hofrath, smiling.

"Ah! it is very good of you—you are a very clever doctor; and he is much interested in your welfare, Mademoiselle," she continued, turning to Miss Thurston; "but all the same he has some whimsical notions. Not very long ago, Mademoiselle, he talked about your dress to me, and I led him on, ha, ha! I said things it would be an impertinence did I permit myself to repeat them to your face, Mademoiselle, and *he*—he thought me blind—that I did not know. Ah! M. le Docteur, after all you are *but* a man, and saying that, I say everything!"

The Hofrath cast a comical look at Bertha, who now joined them. "Shall I tell her?" he whispered, seeing that Miss Thurston had effected her escape.

"I think it would be much better," she

answered in the same tone, as they all returned to the drawing-room.

"I am about to make you a confidence, Frau Semmling," said the Hofrath, sitting down beside her.

"Indeed," she exclaimed, knowing perfectly well what was coming, and resolved not to give him the least assistance.

"I am about to take a step," he said, "that will give me more happiness than I ever hoped to enjoy in this world since the death of my dear departed wife, of angelic memory. I am going to be married to Mademoiselle Thurston."

Frau Semmling hastily took out something that might have been a young towel in England, but was in reality her pocket-handkerchief. "The dear departed!" she said, with a little catch in her throat that was only distantly related to a sob.

"I have sincerely mourned for the excellent wife I lost many years," said Herr Hofrath, with gentle dignity and real feel-

ing; "that I am permitted to feel once more that there is some brightness left for me in this world is a great cause for thankfulness. Miss Thurston is a very amiable woman, and will win the respect of all who become acquainted with her."

"Yes," interposed Bertha. "No one, of course, can know Miss Thurston's good qualities as I do, to whom she has been a mother for so many years; but when you all do know her you will do her justice!"

"To be commended by so amiable a frau as Frau Herbert, says *everything!*" said Madame Semmling, from behind her handkerchief.

"No, not everything," said Bertha, with a stroke of policy beyond praise. "Here, a foreigner, and but little known, her first reception is of infinite consequence. *You* stand in a position to do her an essential service. You hold a very good position in the place. (Here Frau Semmling removed the handkerchief from her face.)

You are independent, and so situated that you cannot have interested motives. Now, there are others——"

"True," exclaimed Frau Semmling, nearly disarmed; "Fraulein Bauer, for instance. Poor thing! Ach, Herr Hofrath! she has spent all her money in trying to win your obdurate heart. How she will hate you now! And those poor Mademoiselles Edlenbröppe, who have paraded up and down for hours outside your house, and are always giving us all to understand that they know more about your proceedings than anybody else—what will they say, Herr Je? Desseldringen will be very much surprised!"

"I do not plead guilty at all," said Herr Hofrath; "I never misled anybody. Of course, to all the world one does not open one's mind as to so acute and clever a woman as you, Frau Semmling, who are so gifted with discernment."

"Ja," said that excellent woman, swal-

lowing the bait with facility; "it is not given to every fly to see the feathers on his neighbour's legs! As I often say to my man, I do not boast. Vanity never had any hold upon me, but discretion, and knowing how to hold one's tongue. Ja! I never prided myself upon my personal appearance (very justly, thought her hearers), but I know why all other people hold me in respect. A difficulty occurs—the wise heads say, 'Let us go to the Frau Semmling;' and I say, 'You must do this, or you must not do that,' and all goes well." (Unfortunately, she caught a satirical smile on Herr Hofrath's face, and she went on in a different strain in consequence.) "Yes, Herr Hofrath, I do not boast; but you are a wise person to have taken the trouble to seek me. I will not fail you. When the good people around us say, as doubtless they will say, 'What! the Herr Hofrath going to marry a foreigner, and one, too, in such an inferior position to

his own?'—when they say, as they doubtless will say, 'What! the Herr Hofrath, at his advanced age, take a second wife!'—I will remind them that you are not so *very* old. I will take your part, rest assured. I will not hesitate to say to these Desseldringeners, 'Yes, you are right, the Fraulein Thurston is in a very inferior position to the Herr Hofrath—all the better, she will not make him an extravagant wife; and, with regard to the age, as they are both very old, it does not signify!'"

Want of breath alone silenced her, and Bertha was afraid that Herr Hofrath, completely out of patience, would have lost his temper; but he was far too wise a man to fight Frau Semmling with any other weapons than her own.

Making her a low bow, he said, "You are, as always, Frau Semmling—you are of all people the best able to set our marriage in a pleasant light. Look at the position you hold at this time—look how

many prejudices you have overcome, except that the world (I mean the Desseldringen world) say a few, a very few, ill-natured things about you——"

"Ill-natured things about me!" said Frau Semmling, angrily—"ill-natured things about *me!* What do they say about me? I insist upon hearing!"

"Calm yourself, dear Frau Semmling—calm yourself. You know there are always malicious persons who take pleasure in saying ill-natured things about everybody!"

"I insist upon knowing what is said," reiterated the angry woman. "You must and shall tell me!"

"If I must," said Herr Hofrath, smiling; and then, growing grave, he said, "Never mind it at all, dear Frau Semmling. I was wrong to say so much. It would only vex you. There is no denying, they say horribly disagreeable things. Let them rest—they are of no consequence."

"Horribly disagreeable things, and about

me!" said Frau Semmling, furiously. "Speak! Herr Hofrath—speak!"

"They say," answered the Hofrath—"but really, Frau Semmling, it is only nonsense."

"Grant me heavenly patience!" ejaculated Frau Semmling. "Speak, will you? They say——"

"They say," continued Herr Hofrath, slowly, and as if with extreme reluctance, "that you consider low diet good for your household every day of the week; and that your sauerkraut is always stinted in vinegar, and consequently never is so good as that of your neighbours."

"How atrocious! How desperately wicked!" said Frau Semmling, nearly choking with indignation. "What lies! What dreadful lies! I'll go to the bourgemestre! I'll have redress! *My* sauerkraut, prepared according to a famous recipe handed down to me by my great-grandmother. How wicked the world is growing,

to be sure! Pray does *the world* say nothing else about me?"

"A good deal of nonsense," answered the Hofrath, "but not worth speaking about. I merely mentioned these trifles to show you——"

"Trifles!" screamed the Frau Semmling, furiously. "Oh yes! it is a trifle to say that I make bad sauerkraut, I dare say; it is a trifle to say that I starve my household. Oh, pray go on; any more 'trifles' to tell me about. If my husband had the spirit of a cockchafer I should be revenged. Pray does the world say nothing about him?"

"A good deal," said the Hofrath, calmly.

"Ah! indeed—a good deal—the world is famous for saying a good deal about nothing," said Frau Semmling, very contemptuously. "Pray what does it say?"

"That he is a very good man when he is left in peace."

"Left in peace," answered Frau Semm-

ling. "Why, nobody ever meddles with him but myself!"

"No one but yourself."

"Ach! Herr Hofrath, now I see, now I know," blazed Madame Semmling, "what you mean; for *the world* read yourself and your friends. Oh! I shall go perfectly deranged with passion! Have I lived to be told that I ill-treat my husband, starve my household, and make bad sauerkraut," and sinking back in her chair, she burst into a flood of tears.

"Let us make friends," said Herr Hofrath, in a kind voice, as he drew near her, but her cries redoubled.

Infinitely amused as Bertha had been, she was vexed with this finale, and making a sign to the Hofrath to withdraw, she applied herself to the difficult task of smoothing Frau Semmling's ruffled feelings. Finding the Hofrath gone, and that Bertha evidently did not sympathize with her

heartily, she recovered herself very soon, and bidding Bertha a frigid good-bye, to her infinite satisfaction, Madame Semmling, adjusting her clogs and assuming her cape, departed.

CHAPTER IV.

FRANK HERBERT A WIDOWER.

The month of July brought with it the most intense heat that had ever been remembered.

Thunder-storm succeeded thunder-storm, without, apparently, relieving the air of its heaviness.

Vegetation perished, the dense foliage hung listlessly from the trees; all animal life seemed inert and languid; the thunder-showers were violent and sharp, and after each the earth steamed.

The very birds showed their sense of oppression; they clung to the boughs and twigs where the shade was greatest, and their song was almost a forgotten thing.

Bertha felt this intense heat desperately; this damp, moist, heavy air brought to her a feverish languor, against which she struggled in vain. All motion was an exertion; her appetite failed, and she was continually dying of thirst which nothing quenched. She exerted herself and managed to keep all suspicion from her husband. What was the use of harassing and distressing him, and avowing an illness that nothing would remedy except an impossible change?

Without any actual illness there is a gradual fading of all the vitality of one's being; the spirits sink, and the love of life that so helps one to linger on, grows feeble. Miss Thurston thought Bertha had grown silent and grave, but she was very busy preparing to move into her new house, and was a good deal at Sauerlich still, where she was both liked and appreciated.

Frank in the meantime was getting very anxious about the mines under his care.

Very unexpectedly water had risen in an important working, and the measures for keeping it under were obliged to be on so extensive a scale, that they absorbed the profits. Already he talked of the necessity that soon might exist for abandoning them; already their quiet and settled prospects had begun to cloud!

Not that Frank felt this much; he had never cordially taken to this foreign life. He missed his daily paper; missed his shooting; missed the thousand-and-one things that form the joys of an Englishman's existence.

Without any occupation he had found time hang heavy on his hands at home, and now, in spite of the remembrance of it all, he heartily wished he were once more in England, where he would *make* some occupation for himself.

Besides, he imagined that he had learnt a great deal, and certainly he had acquired

some of his wife's tastes. He enjoyed reading over things with her, and fancied that he must blame himself for having felt so much at a loss before. Frank's natural disposition always inclined him to reflect upon his own short-comings; the only thing that made his life bearable at Sauerlich was the society of his wife, which he daily more appreciated, and the salary which so much exceeded anything he could hope to get in England.

Things were in this state when one of those low fevers broke out at Desseldringen, for which no cause could be assigned except that universal scape-goat the weather.

The Hofrath, the bourgemestre, and all the authorities met repeatedly to discuss the subject. They did everything that would have been done in England, except dining over it, but though several sanitary rules were made, it was difficult to enforce

them. A great deal of time was spent (or misspent) in assigning various causes. One thing was clear, there were no drains, consequently they could not be to blame.

In the meantime the people were dying fast, and the fever spreading.

Poor Bertha! she dreaded each day to see one of her loved ones taken ill, and the anticipation proved true.

Her boy sickened, and after two days of intense anxiety, Bertha herself, predisposed to illness, was struck down, and was soon dangerously ill.

How devotedly she was nursed need not be told! Frank, Miss Thurston, and Herr Hofrath spent every moment they could between her and her boy.

There are supreme moments in life when the nothingness of all things earthly is forced upon you—when you wonder, with a grave astonishment, at your battles, your anxieties about what then appear in their

true colours. But it is not here that a deathbed can be dwelt upon!

The child and the mother faded together. There was a brief interval of consciousness —of wild hope—passionate words and prayers—clinging kisses—and all was over.

CHAPTER V.

FRANK HERBERT'S SECOND WIFE.

In a drawing-room of moderate dimensions, in a villa near a country town, sat a lady waiting for her husband.

This lady was fair, short, and very stout. Her legs being rather too short, for the buxom beginning gave her a tendency to waddle when she walked. She was not pretty, certainly, but she was not plain. Her eyes, eyebrows, complexion, and hair being all exactly the same sort of colour, gave rather a monotony to her general appearance, increased by her dress, which was of a drab hue—so frequently adopted by women who, having a great sameness bestowed by nature, carry out the idea in their costume.

She had a dowdy look; and, what was worse, the cheap mohair abomination she had on was not particularly clean. Nevertheless, she was a lady, and Frank Herbert's second wife.

She was sitting at a table, which was covered with snips of stuff, ends of ribbon, bits of thread, scissors, pincushion, and all the litter consequent on the manufacture of a dress.

On the sofa and on the floor, among the cinders of a very untidy fireplace, the ubiquitous stuff was lying.

Mrs. Francis Herbert No. 2 saved a few shillings, and made a great figure of herself, by making her own gowns. Liking variety and economy, she was one of the people who bought those wonderful "bargains," where the shillings are marked in very conspicuous large characters, and the $11\frac{3}{4}d.$ in very small ones. Everything she used was, by her own account, a bargain—a very great bargain. The chair she sat on was

one bargain, and the carpet on the floor was another, which accounted for the dislocated look of groups of flowers which were running after each other up all the seams.

It never struck her that it was not a cheerful home to come to after a journey —it never occurred to her that nothing affects a man more than a general look of untidiness and the litter of a room like hers.

It was a dreary room, and Frank Herbert felt it when he entered with his daughter, now a tall and very graceful girl of fifteen.

Alice had been spending a few weeks in London with her great-aunt, Lady Cecil. Her father had gone up to fetch her, and spend a few days there; and after the pleasant impressions of a very happy visit, it was a great change.

Alice Herbert was her mother's own child in many ways: she had the same love

of beauty, the same shrinking from everything common or ugly; the same refined look; but her education had been very different, and she inherited some of her father's best qualities. Now, her first little look of disgust was instantly smoothed away as she saw, by her father's face, that he felt it for himself and for *her*.

"We are quite ready for tea or dinner, whichever you propose giving us," said Frank, trying to speak cheerfully.

"Dinner!" exclaimed his wife. "I thought of course you would have dined before leaving London."

"Tea will do better than anything," said Alice.

Mrs. Herbert rang the bell, and a tired looking girl answered it, and received instructions.

The tea was not exactly a tempting meal —some stale bread, a slice of butter (not made into pats), and very common brown earthenware crockery; a few slices of badly-

made toast, a small jug of milk, and a little brown sugar in a basin.

What a contrast to the early tea provided for Alice in London! the lovely china cups, the glittering silver, and the dainty cakes, and bread and butter.

Mrs. Herbert always said it was useless to buy pretty things, they broke just as easily and cost a great deal more money.

"Have you any cold meat?" asked Frank, "or an egg? You would like an egg, Alice, would you not?"

"Eggs are *very* dear," said Mrs. Frank; "you only get ten for a shilling; but Alice can have one *to-night*. There is a little cold boiled mutton in the house, if you like it; I am afraid it is a little tough."

Alice declined the extravagant egg; and the mutton arrived, and *was* tough.

"The butcher's bill has been six shillings and threepence less than usual, the three or four days you have been away," said Mrs.

Herbert, with a certain triumph in her tone.

"Ah!" said Frank, "has it really? We have forgotten all about butchers' bills, have we not, Alice?"

"Most likely," said his wife, drily. "I should think Lady Cecil does not know much about any domestic arrangements! Very likely does not know the way to her own kitchen."

"Mrs. Lilly does everything for Aunt Cecil, mamma," said Alice. "She has been there such a number of years."

"Ah! an old servant. Nobody need try to make *me* believe that any old servant equals the practical eye of the mistress. All I can say is, that if I were to become a duchess to-morrow, I should make it a point of knowing *everything* just as much as I do now; but then I certainly was not educated as a fine lady!"

The tea being over, Mr. Herbert left the room, and Alice dutifully listened to the

various pieces of news in which her step-mother took so great an interest, and which her father found so distasteful that he had gone out to avoid hearing it all.

The Miss Willises had changed their way of doing their hair. "I suppose they fancy it becoming," said Mrs. Frank. "As if anything they ever did would make them good-looking." Mrs. Prosper's eldest son had come home from school; his mother tried to make people believe it was illness, but *she* knew better. If ever a boy looked like a young reprobate, it was that eldest boy of Mrs. Prosper's. She would not be at all surprised to find he had been expelled, or at any rate, got into a serious scrape. According to her the gallows alone was his future, or something nearly as bad!

Having doomed young Prosper, and dilated upon the impertinence of the grocer's young man, she diverged into a general tirade against the tradespeople of

the place, with whom her love of bargains had brought her into antagonism, and finally dismissed Alice to bed, that she might go round the house, and see that everything was carefully locked up.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. CLOTT OFFERS CONSOLATION

When Frank Herbert found himself a widower, he had no more idea of marrying again than he had of flying.

Always fond of his wife, he felt when she was taken from him how many times he had perhaps helped to make her changed position a difficult one.

We all feel a sort of remorse when separation takes place at the recollection of missed opportunities of kindness, and vainly reflect on a very different plan of comfort if it were only once more in our power to show forbearance, kindness, or sympathy. As soon as possible he gave up his post at Sauerlich, and having wit-

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nessed Miss Thurston's marriage to Herr Hofrath, he gladly turned his back on Desseldringen, and returned to England with his little girl.

He went in the first instance to a village close to where he himself, as a child, had lived, and took up his abode with an old servant of his mother's, who gladly welcomed him and his child as her lodgers.

Day after day he walked with his little girl, alone, and it was a touching sight to observe him trying to understand and enter into the childish wishes and wants of the motherless little thing, and carefully guarding her from every rude or deteriorating influence.

Like many arrangements made by men who have nothing to rouse them to a sense of deficiencies, the lodging with old Mrs. Coomb, first looked upon by both her and Mr. Herbert as a temporary place, went on from day to day till nearly two years had elapsed.

In a village like Braxfield it is not to be supposed that Mr. Herbert's appearance, sayings, and doings, as well as the many things he neither said nor did, passed without comment.

Frank's face, with its melancholy expression, created great sympathy. Then the feminine element said that "of course he must feel helpless with a motherless child upon his hands;" and of course every one wished to help him by providing him with a second wife.

Braxfield expected him to marry, but he kept so aloof from society, and apparently did not know the difference when old Mrs. Babbage or her pretty daughter spoke to him, that no one was brave enough to hazard an assertion respecting his likings, dislikings, or probable views of matrimony.

In common with most of the young ladies of the place, Miss Bessie Graves, the orphan niece of Mr. and Mrs. Clott, and

their supposed heiress, was much interested in both Mr. Herbert and Mr. Herbert's daughter.

Though the father was not sociable, there were many opportunities of making friends with the child; and old Mrs. Coomb loved nothing so well as talking of the old days, and of his grand lady wife—of the letters he received with "crownets" upon them, and the letters he sent to "dukes and duchesses."

Mrs. Coomb was quite alive to the propriety of setting him off to the best advantage in the eyes of a young lady who had a small independence of her own, and who was the reputed heiress of a good many thousand pounds.

Miss Bessie, feeling herself a little behind the scenes, was able to make herself very agreeable to our friend Frank; and he could hardly entirely refuse the constant offers of kindness pressed upon his child by Miss Graves and her uncle and aunt.

Besides this, Mrs. Coomb always made the best of all Miss Graves said, and it was not in the nature of a lonely man not to be pleased with warm and sympathizing expressions apparently so perfectly disinterested; but no idea had entered into Frank's head of the possibility of any closer connexion between them.

Old Mr. Clott, however, who considered that his niece Bessie was conferring a favour upon any one by bestowing her regards upon him, especially when, according to his *parvenu* ideas, that man was "worth nothing," was troubled with no scruples of delicacy. He had long wished to see his niece married, and he had a great liking for a thorough gentleman, and at Braxfield it was not very likely that Miss Bessie would find any one who was so eligible as Mr. Herbert in every respect save money.

The old gentleman fancied that Frank was only held back by his scanty means

from declaring his affection; and the idea of two people seeing each other frequently during two years and remaining quite indifferent to each other never occurred to him. He determined, therefore, to give things what he was pleased to call "*a start*," and there is no doubt he gave Frank a good one in every sense of the word.

Meeting him alone one day, he thought the opportunity too good to be lost, and, turning round, said he had no particular place to go to, and would be Mr. Herbert's companion; to which, of course, Frank could only give a polite answer, expressive of a pleasure he did *not* actually feel.

"You are ruminating," said old Clott, as they walked along, and he found that his companion was very silent, and that his little efforts tending towards conversation were completely unsuccessful. "Is it fair to ask if your thoughts are pleasant or not?"

"My thoughts are sad enough," said his companion, in a depressed tone of voice.

"Then send them to the right-about, and put pleasant ones in their stead," said Mr. Clott, in the tone of a man whose experience of any unpleasant thoughts was wholly of a limited order.

"Easier said than done," answered Mr. Herbert.

"Come," continued Mr. Clott, "let us have a look at these unpleasant thoughts of yours; let me see if nothing can be done about them."

"You are very kind," said Mr. Herbert, "but they do not bear inspection."

"Not bear inspection? Humph! secret, private and confidential; well, you should try and forget them, and hope for better things."

"Hope!" echoed Frank Herbert, in a low voice; "I do not see exactly what hope and I have to do with each other."

"No!" said old Clott, looking at him.

"Why, what a desponding person you are. Why should you give up all hope and that sort of thing at your age, eh? Suppose"—and here he stopped and took hold of Frank's arm—"suppose I can give you hope!"

"I do not in the least understand you," said his companion.

"Not understand me, eh? 'Hope' in connexion with a certain niece of mine, 'Bessie Graves!'"

"Miss Graves!" exclaimed Frank. "Why, what on earth has she to do with it?"

"Why, weren't you thinking of Bessie Graves?" said Mr. Clott, in a doleful voice.

"Not at all," answered Frank, bluntly.

"Then why the deuce did you say you were?" said old Clott, fiercely, striking his stick into the ground.

"I never said anything about her," answered Frank, calmly.

"Well, you implied it, sir," said Mr. Clott; "you implied it. I meant it, if you didn't, and you never contradicted me.

Why, who did you suppose I referred to, when I spoke of hope and pleasant thoughts?"

"Certainly, I never connected either with Miss Graves," said Frank. "Why should I?"

"Why should you? Well, that *is* good," ejaculated Mr. Clott; "because — why should you? Bessie Graves is well worth thinking about, I can tell you, especially when she takes it into her head to think about you. I conceive that if you never thought of it before (which I don't believe), you'll think about it now." And Mr. Clott chuckled.

Never was a man more taken by surprise than Frank Herbert. He could almost have laughed at Mr. Clott's coolness.

"Now, Mr. Herbert," continued Mr. Clott, who was bent upon striking now the iron was hot, "I believe, by all accounts, you have every reason to regret your first wife —I ought simply to say, your wife. Old Mrs. Coomb has told us all a great deal

about her; and besides, your little girl is extremely pretty, and not in the least like you; so the chances are that she is very like her mother. Now, stop a moment. I know you are just going to say what all men say, and some men feel—constancy, and a shattered heart—only part of it left, —the rest buried in the grave of your late wife, &c. &c. Now, my dear fellow, I know it all by heart. Bless you, I lost my first wife—a very good woman she was, poor thing!—and I know all the sensations quite well: first stage, despair and a great deal of crying; second stage, you cherish your sorrow; third stage, gentle despondency—life is a blank; fourth stage, consolation arises in the shape of No. 2. Now, don't say a word, but think it over;" and with a hearty shake of the hand, Mr. Clott walked off as quick as he could.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. HERBERT FOLLOWS MR. CLOTT'S ADVICE.

FRANK'S first thought was that it would be a relief to "punch" old Clott's head. The whole idea of marrying Miss Graves was utterly ridiculous; and then her uncle announcing the fact of her taking an interest in him was very indelicate. The idea of this proposed alliance was *so* ridiculous, that it recurred to him several times, in spite of himself; perhaps it was this that made him look at Miss Graves with more attention than he had hitherto done, and notice that her colour certainly rose when she met his eye.

Our friend Frank had his weak points as well as most men, and the idea of having,

without effort, created an interest in the breast of a young lady with a fortune in hand and a larger one in expectancy, was not absolutely disagreeable to him. "Poor thing!" he thought, "I am sorry she has wasted any thoughts upon me for want of something better to do; of course she had no idea that her wretched old uncle would betray her; she is not half a bad-looking girl; I dare say she will marry happily some day," &c. &c.

Mr. Herbert had no more idea of Miss Graves' real character than he had of the character of his most distant acquaintance.

Bessie Graves was one of those people who are made up of negatives. She did nothing absolutely wrong. The things she left undone were more in number than the things she did. She never did an unkind thing, but she never did a kind one unless the opportunity came very easily to her, and though she never actually told an untruth, she gave false impressions when it

suited her, and never risked anything by defending an absent friend.

Brought up by the Clotts from the age of thirteen, she had arrived at Braxfield, her moral growth stunted by perpetual makeshifts on the part of her parents to show the best face to the world under difficulties. At the Clotts' she saw the influence of money in its lowest form. A small manufacturing place did not afford sufficient competition to bring out the higher and better part of men's characters there. And old Clott, who would have found his level over and over again in a larger sphere, reigned a sort of king at Braxfield, making money, living for it, and spending it almost entirely upon himself.

Daily reminded of the importance of wealth, Miss Graves naturally valued herself most because she had the prospect of succeeding to it. Heartily despising the class she sprang from, her whole ambition was to win by her money the *entrée* into a society

whose real merits she knew nothing of, and whose position she so much coveted.

Frank Herbert's appearance, his aristocratic name, and the evident refinement of his little girl, first captivated her imagination, and when she learned from old Mrs. Coomb all about his and his wife's friends, connexions, and acquaintances, she felt that now or never was her opportunity. Once "Mrs. Herbert," and backed with her money, *she* would figure in the "Morning Post" and "Court Journal," and all her former acquaintances would be obliged to yield to her superiority.

According to Mrs. Coomb, Mr. Herbert corresponded constantly with all his connexions, consequently they must like him, and she as his wife would come in for a share of the loaves and fishes.

The duchess ! yes, she felt certain the duchess would ask her to tea. Could the delights of high life go beyond this ! She had not the faintest idea that a man, when

he marries a second time, is generally supposed to give his first wife's friends a very good excuse for dropping him unless *they* happen to be particularly attached to him, or *he* is in a position to be very useful to them, or he has been left with a good many pretty children in whose future destinies the mother's friends feel a hopeful interest—so that everything conspired to make her particularly agreeable to Mr. Herbert.

As for that gentleman, in spite of Mr. Clott's "start," it is only fair to say that one motive weighed more with him than any other.

If he married a rich wife he should be able to give Alice a governess, to surround her with many things he had no power to give her at present, and he was afraid of trusting his own judgment about her.

To a man totally unaccustomed to children, her rapidly opening intelligence was startling; the questions asked by all clever

children seemed to him proof of a talent that was beyond him, and the quickness of repartee, the natural result of the fearless terms she was on with her father, and the constant encouragement he gave her, appeared to him miraculous.

Miss Graves was evidently amiable and disinterested, or *why* should she take an interest in him? As a woman *she* would probably understand Alice, and all would go well. This certainly had great weight with him, and the thought of a closer alliance with Miss Graves no longer appeared so "ridiculous." But why try to explain what never can be explained? Nothing is so incomprehensible as the successors given by men to a first wife whose superiority stands out as a perpetual contrast to the inheritor of her privileges and name!

Not quite so soon as Mr. Clott expected, but in due course of time, Mr. Herbert made up his mind, and spoke not to Miss Graves but to her uncle. He did *not* speak of

his first wife, but he did speak of his child, and Mr. Clott said half for him, hustled him in to Miss Graves, shook hands with them both several times, fetched Mrs. Clott, who actually embraced her nephew elect, and altogether made such a fuss that Mr. Herbert was nearly driven to the dilemma of a breach of promise case.

When the marriage was settled, Frank wrote to the happy wife of the Hofrath. Too generous to place the woman he was about to marry in a slighted position, even to an intimate friend, she recognised enough in the tone of his letter to lay aside her jealous fears of Bertha's memory being no longer cherished. Forgetting her own position as a second wife, she was selfishly pleased to see that of love, real love, there was very little—and this reconciled her more to the marriage than anything. The wording of the letter was all very well, but she looked deeper than the words, and she saw and felt that Bertha was not forgotten.

CHAPTER VIII.

DISAPPOINTMENTS.

Frank found to his surprise that it was very difficult to reconcile Miss Graves to a quiet wedding. She had pictured to herself, not perhaps "the duchess," but certainly a few "ladies," and at least a lord, and her disappointment was excessive. In imagination she had filled a whole column of the local newspaper with an account of the proceedings; and to come down from *this* to three lines in the usual place was a blow.

"Mr. Herbert quite forgets it's my first wedding though it's his second," she said in private to her aunt; and that good lady shook her head, but committed herself to no expressed opinion.

Mrs. Clott did not quite know whether the *éclat* of some great people would counterbalance the consequent increased expense.

"I'm not afraid of the lords and ladies, my dear Bessie," she said to her niece, in a confidential moment; "but it's the maids, and the valets, and the *sooite*. I know very well what upsetting and downsetting things *they* are. Some of those big footmen would turn the heads of my servants; and then the way they eat! What with relishes for breakfast at nine, and luncheon at eleven, the dinners, and the teas, *and* the suppers, it's eating all day long. I know all about it, because Sarah's stupid sister came home ill (and no wonder), and she told me of all the goings on: ladies' maids in low evening dress, and playing cards, and dropping their *h*'s, and looking like dressed up fools (why, my steady old servants would go into fits); not to mention worse things she hinted about their mistresses' clothes, and even

jewels; and then, like so many Cinderellas, they change their dresses to go and brush their ladies' hair. Oh! I don't want the servants; and if the great people come, I suppose it would not do to ask them to come without any *sooite*."

"There is no chance of any one coming," said Miss Bessie; "I believe Mr. Herbert has written to ask them not to come."

"Well, my dear, never mind; your marriage will be just as much a marriage without them. Except for the Willises, I don't care about it; I believe we shall be happier without them; and one thing, Bessie, we shan't require half so big a cake!"

Other "courses," besides the proverbial one of true love, occasionally run anything but smoothly. The last hitch in the world expected by Frank was precisely the one which occurred on this occasion.

Miss Bessie having a fortune of about two hundred pounds a year, Mr. Clott made her an allowance of two hundred pounds more,

on condition that it went to pay the interest of a sum of money for which Mr. Herbert must insure his life. The reason he gave was, that as all his money was invested in his manufactory, some unlucky day might see it disappear, and Mrs. Herbert and the dozen children he predicted she would have would be left penniless, since everything Frank had was tied up for the benefit of his little girl.

When *he* found how matters were to be arranged, he endeavoured to represent to his betrothed that marrying on such a very small income was extremely foolish, and wished her, at all events, to postpone the wedding; but he found her firm. "It sufficed for you before, under different management," she said, calmly; "you will find it will suffice now."

Frank winced.

Old Mr. Clott bought a neat villa in a small garden, which he presented to his niece as his wedding present, and added a

certain sum of money for the furniture (of which she did not spend half), and Mrs. Clott gave them some plate and linen; and so, having gained nothing he had expected (which, perhaps, served him right) Mr. Herbert was married for the second time.

Miss Bessie Graves and Mrs. Francis Herbert were two very different people. From the first, the latter laid aside in private life every adventitious aid that rendered her passable in public.

Economy is no doubt a virtue where it is necessary, but her economy consisted of being miserable in private life in order to shine before strangers. Her dress for her husband's especial benefit was dowdy, and often dirty; but then she had several "best dresses" in which to astonish the world. No meanness was too small for her to condescend to when alone, in order that she might give dreary little entertainments to her acquaintances, where the ices tasted more of peppermint than anything else, and

the cakes were a "bargain" because they were stale.

No man could be more keenly alive to such a system than Mr. Herbert. It was something new to him that all the possible comfort of his home was to be crushed, in order that a few underbred men and women should jostle each other now and then in his little drawing-room, receiving with ill-concealed gratification the elaborate apologies his wife *would* make with reference to the inferiority of *her* parties to theirs!

Bertha was amply avenged! How often he had thought *her* "fine" and "absurd" for not condescending to the petty thrifts that so disgusted him when seen in all their nakedness now. Possibly a third Mrs. Herbert might have hit upon the "juste milieu;" as it was, he hated the wretched style of living pronounced "absolutely necessary" by his wife, and did *not* believe in its necessity.

In all their struggles, Bertha's drawing-

room had always looked pretty and *homey;* she had taught Frank to appreciate her happy knack of arranging the plainest things so as to give that look of comfort to a room that insensibly affects one so much. The reigning Mrs. Herbert lacked *all* imagination. To her a chair was simply a chair; if covered with something common, it was all that was wanted, and those that adorned her front drawing-room (which she never sat in) might, and indeed must be very smart, because if people ever sat down in them, it was only when dressed in their best, and for a very short time.

When people inveigh against the dangers of "imagination," have they ever considered, or are they personally acquainted with any one totally devoid of it?

Among the many clever essays which the cleverest review of the day has published from to time, an essay of "imagination" remains unwritten. Nothing in the world can make up for the want of this

faculty in a woman! In a man it does not signify so much; he has to play so much more earnest a part in life, that he may be as matter-of-fact as he pleases; but a woman, whose influence ought to be a refining one, whose nature supplies the graceful, the poetical part to his prose, if she is incapable of seeing the beautiful side of life, she is only half a proper helpmate for him.

All men, whatever they may be themselves, appreciate that something so invisible and yet so powerful in woman, that some call refinement and some fastidiousness, but that springs in reality from the poetry natural to every true woman, unless it has been extinguished and crushed by circumstances; and it might be curious to trace how much "love" owes to this peculiar faculty, and a certain amount of upholstery!

A sense of, what men value most (especially a busy man, whose intellect is on

the stretch the whole day) repose, comes over the spirit of a man who returns home to find the room his wife lives in arranged so that he recognises immediately *home* and comfort; the chairs and tables so placed that *they* look at home; and no glaring or incongruous contrasts to distract his eye, and make him feel that his peculiar world is out of joint!

Mrs. Herbert was one of those terribly sensible people who "never read fiction," and despised every one who did; her whole range of ideas revolved round herself and Braxfield; no sensational romance could give her half the excitement that the Miss Willises did, when they received bonnets from Paris at the least three inches smaller than hers, and announced that high bonnets had "gone out" and "small ones" come in. So intensely provoking, as she said to Mrs. Clott; she had just made herself two—and the waste of stuff! Mrs. Clott entered into the grievance, con-

solingly reminding her *they* could easily be altered, but if it had been small bonnets gone up high . . . Mrs. Herbert, not having taken this view of the question, allowed that it was consoling, and—altered her bonnets.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. HERBERT FINDS THAT HE HAS MADE A MISTAKE.

It must not be supposed that Mrs. Herbert and her husband found on continued trial that they had much in common. One great source of annoyance to Frank was the continued intimacy with gossiping and underbred people, whose conversation consisted of servants and their delinquencies, and who poured into the ears of his wife the most ridiculous, but at the same time mischievous stories possible. The most trifling action on the part of some acquaintance not popular at the moment was placed in every possible position, and tortured and twisted into a thousand mean-

ings. Frank felt all this for Alice intensely. Looking upon his daughter almost as a sacred legacy from her mother, he could not bear to see her familiarized with a form of vulgarity it might be so difficult to efface afterwards. He tried to check his wife's friendships, but in vain; and indeed, he felt that as he gave her no better society, he could not justly complain.

Another year had nearly passed away, when the life at Braxfield presented another and a worse evil to the anxious mind of Frank.

Amongst his wife's acquaintances there were some young men, the sons of her greatest friend and ally. To Frank's horror these presumptuous young men ventured to admire Alice; not only that, but they dared to admire her openly.

In great indignation he went to his wife, utterly forgetting that it was impossible for her to see the presumption in the light he did.

It was a great shock to his feelings when he found that she considered it not only very natural, but not at all a bad thing.

"Their income will be double what yours is," said she; "so why you should consider it so reprehensible I cannot see. What do you expect for Alice? Indeed, *I* think that she will be a lucky girl to settle so early in life so well. A penniless girl with no expectations, or very small ones, may do much worse. I think you are very unreasonable."

Frank could hardly conceal his feelings. Unreasonable he might be, but he *could* not bring himself to imagine his beautiful Alice in such a position. His silence irritated his wife, and she gave vent to feelings that had long smouldered in her bosom. She reproached Frank bitterly for despising her connexions; and went on to tell him all her disappointment about the position she held, and the way in which he had always kept her in the background.

"When I married you," she said, "I ex-

pected that I should be introduced to *some* of your friends. Now what has it been? Three separate times you have gone up to London, and taken Alice, and I have never been asked! The Willises asked me, the last time you went, why I had not gone, in their ill-natured, pointed way; and said they supposed I found your relations high! High indeed! they might have paid one a little civility."

"You forget," said Frank, "that they are not *my* relations."

"No, I don't," answered his wife; "I know what they are, and I know what *you* mean."

"Twice out of the three times you mention," said Frank, "I have lived at my club, and Alice has been alone at her Aunt Cecil's."

"Oh, you need not try to explain," said Mrs. Herbert; "but all I've got to say is this, when I married you I felt you were very poor, but you had connexion; so that

if I brought one thing you brought another. Now, what good have your connexions ever done me? I have not even been introduced to one of them. The duchess you and Alice make such a fuss about, she behaved like a lady, and sent me a piece of china; but as for my going up to London and being presented at Court, and all that, as I, and I may say my friends, expected, you've never thought of it. I dare say you will go to London again very soon, but you'll never think of taking *me*."

"My dear Bessie," urged her husband, who felt that perhaps she had some reason for reproaching him on this score, "if you went to London the expense would be perfectly enormous!"

"That's nonsense," said his wife; "if I went to London I'd take Sarah, and if we stayed anywhere one fortnight, the expense of the journey would be quite

covered by the saving in the household books."

"But," said Frank, "if we went up to London in that way, who do you suppose could receive us?—we have no invitation to go and stay anywhere."

"And you never will have," rejoined his wife. "Why do you not sit down and write to Lady Cecil, and some of your friends, and say, 'My wife, and daughter, a servant, and myself, propose going to London shortly, and, if convenient, will remain a few days with you.'"

"My dear, it would be quite impossible," said Frank, immensely amused at the idea of Lady Cecil's face on the receipt of such a proposition.

"Why impossible?" asked his wife.

"Because London and the country are so different," said Frank.

"Yes," rejoined his wife, "and people—London people!—are *very* different. Well,

then, write—or let me write—and say we think of going to London, but cannot make our plans; and ask if Lady Cecil knows of a nice place to go to."

"No," said Frank, "*that* would never do. When you began talking to me about London I was going to tell you something. I saw Dr. Drummond to-day, and he said he thought there was something not quite right about me; and he advised me to go up to London and see Fergusson."

"Indeed!" exclaimed his wife; "you don't look ill to me—only yellow! I don't believe there's anything really wrong. So I *was* right, and you are thinking of going up to London?"

"If I go, and you wish to accompany me, you had better write and see about lodgings; but I am afraid you'll find it very expensive work."

"We shall see," said Mrs. Herbert, in high good humour at having gained her

point so far ; and she went off to Mrs. Clott to report progress.

Frank meanwhile meditated on the annoyance which had given rise to this conversation, and he could see nothing to be done but to remove Alice from Braxfield.

It occurred to him that, if he stated his difficulties to Madame Knoplauch, she might perhaps receive Alice for a time, till a few months more had made her old enough to "come out."

Under the brilliant auspices of her introduction to the world by the Duchess of Branlingham and Lady Cecil, Frank hoped great things for his daughter. Some good man he trusted would succeed in winning her affections, and she might reverse the fate of her mother, and make a very different marriage.

When Dr. Drummond had spoken to Mr. Herbert about his health, and recommended

his taking the best advice, he did not exaggerate the state of things. Frank had an illness that might prove very serious, and he himself knew that he was out of health without exactly appreciating the truth.

The prospect of having Mrs. Herbert with him was not a very cheerful one. It put the possibility of a calm and luxurious change out of the question, and visions of Mrs. Herbert's "bargains," and of all the shifts and contrivances that her husband with failing health found so difficult to endure quietly, felt worse by anticipation, especially when it was added to the certain disagreeables of a cheap London lodging in the month of July.

It is curious how often we fret and fume over something that after all never happens to us! When Mrs. Herbert found that lodgings far exceeded her ideas, and calculated the expense of her journey and dress—above all, when she found that her

husband did not oppose her going, she began to reflect on the many advantages to be gained by her staying behind, and it ended in her remaining.

Alice thoroughly enjoyed the prospect of going to London. She knew nothing of her father's being out of health, and was more than puzzled by Mrs. Herbert's many directions about him. She settled in her own mind that mamma's "fussiness" was extending beyond the sphere of domestic arrangements; now everything was going on smoothly there she must have something else to "fuss" about; and that she was growing crotchetty about him only for want of something better to do.

CHAPTER X.

SHADOWS.

Alice and her father passed a very quiet fortnight in London in Lady Cecil's house.

It would have been a very happy one had it not been for the shadow creeping up about Mr. Herbert's health. Lady Cecil was always anxious to be kind to her great-niece. She was conscious of not having done all that she might have done in the way of smoothing the path of her mother; and now that she herself was getting older she was beginning, like most people, to see things in a very different light.

It was quite contrary to her usual habits to have any one staying with her who required any extra attention or gave trouble;

but she bore it with a very good grace, as a sort of make-up for shortcomings, and she did not say much about it—which was another thing quite contrary to custom—and Alice was spared any claims upon her gratitude in consequence.

The Duchess of Branlingham might be thanked for so much,—she had met Lady Cecil the very day the Herberts were expected, and spoke of their advent as a great pleasure, and congratulated Lady Cecil so warmly upon the comfort it must be to her to be able to receive them, that the little self-commendation her ladyship was just going to murmur died on her lips.

Lady Cecil went home with quite a warm and natural feeling in her worldly heart; and when Mr. Herbert appeared, and looked quite ill enough to become an object of interest, she laid aside as much of herself as she could be expected to forget, and made every possible arrangement for his comfort.

With all her love of the world, and the importance she attached to its sayings and doings, Lady Cecil thoroughly appreciated and enjoyed Alice's society; and she took a great deal of trouble, and gave her many a word which lingered in her mind to bear fruit afterwards.

But the great delight of Alice Herbert was the drives with the duchess, who generally called for her early, and kept her most of the afternoon. How the warm-hearted and affectionate girl dwelt upon the picture of her mother, shown her by that mother's early friend! How charming it was to feel so thoroughly understood as to be able to say *all* she felt, without fear of either ridicule or blame!

Frank, in the meantime, had consulted the best physician, who gave a very decided opinion. He urged an immediate and complete change, and ordered German baths with all the peremptoriness of a man who is not accustomed to deal with patients to

whom money is of the slightest consideration.

Alice ventured to ask him when her father would be quite well; and he looked at her kindly, and said, "It's all right; don't you trouble your nice little head about him;" which was vague, to say the least of it, and did not completely satisfy her. Her father knew well enough what was before him, and he shrank from throwing the slightest tinge of sadness upon her spirits; with a heavy heart he looked forward to what might be her fate, if he ought to say, *when* he died.

Lady Cecil was not young, and she had never said one word about Alice's future. There was no one else, childless and without claims; the duchess had many children of her own; he did not feel sure that his wife would consider Alice had any claim upon her. Sir Luke Haughton! yes, he would write to Sir Luke. He wrote, and stated his anxiety upon the subject, without loss of time.

Sir Luke had not been a complete exile all these years, but he had never seen Frank, from various reasons, purely the result of accident. His answer was written in the kindest and warmest possible way. "Frank had," he said, "conferred a special obligation upon him by his request, and both Lady Haughton and himself would, in the event of what Mr. Herbert expected, do their utmost to supply the place of parents to poor Bertha's child;" but Sir Luke added, "I don't myself believe there's so much the matter with you. I never met a doctor I believed in yet, though I have been obliged to make the fortunes of half-a-dozen, Lady Haughton having a great predilection for them, and my poor boy being always a great sufferer. They have done *him* no good; and as for Lady Haughton, except that she suffers from what *they* call 'irritability of the system,' and I call *excessive crossness*, after their prescriptions, I can-

not see they have done anything for her, probably because, as she has no complaint, they cannot very well undertake to cure it."

Sir Luke evidently wished, as usual, to put away from him as far as possible any painful thing; but his acceptance of the trust Frank Herbert had offered him was an immense relief. He told the duchess about it, and spoke so feelingly and gratefully that she saw how great a weight it must have been, and how completely he had made up his mind that but a short time remained for him upon earth.

But though her sympathy about Alice endeared the duchess more and more to Frank, there was a still greater charm to him in the open, natural, and unreserved way in which she spoke to him about religious things.

It is utterly impossible for any one to have lived even a few years in the world

without recognising the necessity for something higher and deeper than all the world can give, to enable them to bear the various trials with which this life is accompanied. But like several people, Mr. Herbert's religion was not *practical;* he could not bring it into daily use about things which habitually he made distinct from it, and his views were apt to be gloomy or cheerful according to the state of his health.

It was a new idea to him that religion is required to enable one to live, and not only to help one to die. The duchess could not at first understand this. To her it was the groundwork of everything, and was the prop and mainstay of her existence. She could not understand how, without religion, any one could be either cheerful or happy; it was mixed up with her love of home and children, with her affection for her husband, and with every action of her life. Without it, and the constant sense of love

and protection, all would have been to her desolation and despair.

Without cant, without forcing her views upon him, all she did say, and all she implied, went home to the wearied heart of Mr. Herbert with all the force of truth, put eloquently by the earnestness caused by her own belief.

Long after the gentle voice was far away the words remained as an influence which did not stop with Mr. Herbert, but extended to his child.

Before leaving London, acting upon the advice of those so interested in them both, the Herberts engaged a nice active elderly woman, a German, who took all the more interest in Alice from having once been at Haughton during the lifetime of her mother.

There was nothing to detain them in London, and once again father and daughter crossed on their way to Germany, the latter looking forward with all the hopefulness

and eagerness of youth, and the former looking back and remembering at every turn the last time he had followed the same track, to prepare for Bertha that home which she was fated to inhabit for so short a time.

CHAPTER XI.

ANTWERP.

It was not till the bustle of arriving was over, and that Alice had secured a room in the hotel to which Lischen recommended them, that she began to recognise the responsibility of her position.

She had looked forward with delight to having her father all to herself, with no one to remind her of economy or unpleasant things; she had not thought of his being ill, or worse than he had been in London.

When she saw him lying upon the sofa utterly exhausted, and found that he did not rally after a reasonable rest, a tight feeling came over her heart, and she wondered at her blindness in not having

noticed before how rapidly he had lost flesh and colour. Still she hoped much from the complete change, and trusted that a night's rest would enable them to pursue their journey.

But a night's rest brought no strength to Frank Herbert; on the contrary, paroxysms of pain were succeeded by an alarming faintness, and Alice got terribly frightened. Lischen suggested a doctor to Mr. Herbert, who agreed that it might be better to send for one; but after Lischen had left the room, he told Alice that he thought he had much better let his wife know, and give her the option of joining them at Antwerp, now that his illness became more severe.

Alice felt a pang at this announcement, but she knew her father was right, and she wrote to Mrs. Herbert immediately, telling her exactly what her father dictated, and keeping open the letter to enable her to add the doctor's opinion.

She sat quietly beside her father till he

arrived, and then went up to her own little room, with that dull sense of coming evil, that indefinable sort of dread which is, perhaps, more trying to bear than any positive pain.

Sitting there, she watched for the doctor's departure, that she might waylay him, and endeavour to understand his opinion of her father's case—in part of which plan she was successful.

The doctor, whose talents were supposed to exceed those of any others of his profession in the town, was a round-faced, round-shouldered individual, with eyes of so pale a blue that they looked absolutely colourless behind his spectacles, for which reason, perhaps, he had a habit of looking over them; even then, they had so little vivacity, that Alice, in spite of her anxieties, could not help comparing him to some doll, after a certain amount of nursing, wear and tear, had deprived it of colour. His countenance was a most useful one for his

profession, it was so utterly expressionless. Standing before Mr. Herbert's daughter, he felt grieved to the soul for her. It was evident that Mr. Herbert's illness was making rapid strides, and it was a relief to find that he was not to tell this sad news to the angelic mademoiselle before him.

As he was to tell her nothing, he felt quite at his ease. Monsieur was ill? Yes, it was true; but he had seen people worse. Was Monsieur to eat well? Monsieur was to partake of everything, that is, everything wholesome, well understood. Was Monsieur to be kept quiet? As quiet as it pleased him and mademoiselle. Was he to continue his journey? This question required a little more consideration. Monsieur was to do as it seemed to him best. If he wished to travel, why so it must be. If he wished to stay where he was, it was also right. All this time the pale blue eyes and childish face gazed at Alice, without a shade of expression in them. Alice felt that she

was gaining no information, and got very uncomfortable under the vague stare of this son of Esculapius; she was glad to leave him and go to her father, after a few more attempts to draw him out.

Mr. Herbert was, or feigned to be, asleep, so she sat down before the open window, and was soon absorbed in admiration of a picture so new to her, and so full of variety: the rich piles of fruit and flowers, the bright dresses of some of the women, the incessant bustle and movement, the enormous heavy horses with their bells, and the slow monotony of their tramp, the chattering of every one, and the sharp clicking sound of the sabots, all was pleasant to her, and she was just at that happy age when everything is so thoroughly enjoyed.

Mr. Herbert, if he had been asleep, soon woke, but did not speak; he lay watching his child, to him so intensely dear. How like her mother she looked, with the large dark eyes full of that liquid brightness so

distinct from the sharp, piercing look of some dark eyes; the round throat that supported the head was Bertha's own, the great difference lay in the brow. Alice had the low broad brow that so often indicates a powerful will, and intellect of no common order.

Mr. Herbert felt, that if she lived to grow up, she would be beautiful, and then his thoughts reverted to Sir Luke Haughton. Almost with a gasp of pain came the reflection how soon she would have to claim his kindness. One of those overwhelming and despairing feelings took possession of him when he remembered how soon *he must* leave her—poor Alice, poor child!

He said these last words unconsciously almost aloud, and his daughter hurried to his sofa. He looked so white that she fancied he wanted air, and gently drew him to the window.

He was still half sitting, half lying on his chair there, and Alice, with an anxious,

painful feeling, was supporting him, when one of those clumsy, lumbering vehicles that do duty for hackney coaches, turned the corner, and, with an exclamation of delight that startled Alice, Frank recognised the well-known figures of Monsieur and Madame Knoplauch.

CHAPTER XII.

MONSIEUR AND MADAME KNOPLAUCH.

Lady Cecil, though certainly a worldly woman, had, as we have seen, the greatest wish to do what she could for Alice on her mother's account, and for Frank because he was ill, and that he was also her relation "by marriage."

Some time before the Herberts had left her hospitable roof, she had thought over everything for them in a way that did her head, at all events, great credit; her thoughts had blossomed into an active shape, and she had written to Herr Hofrath's happy wife—a step that considerably astonished that excellent woman.

Lady Cecil, after receiving such answers

as the frigidity of her feelings toward one who had never done justice to her beloved Bertha, would allow, proposed that the Knoplauchs should join the Herberts on their arrival at Antwerp.

She wished the doctor, she said, to visit Mr. Herbert professionally and at her expense, and she dwelt upon the probably forlorn position of Alice, at length feeling sure that Madame Knoplauch would enter into it with all her heart, and put impossibilities upon one side in order to accompany her husband, in which idea she was perfectly correct.

Mr. Herbert's excitement and pleasure was something beyond his daughter's comprehension.

He was so grateful to Madame Knoplauch for coming, and expressed his sense of the length of her journey in such feeling terms that Alice was quite astonished.

She little knew the relief it was to him! Now, if the worst happened Alice would not be quite alone; the relief was *so* great

that it momentarily affected his health, and Alice thought she already perceived the good he had derived from his change of climate. Madame Knoplauch was a dignified edition of Miss Mary Thurston. She considered (as many wives do who marry rather late in life) that no one was to be named in the same breath with her husband.

So wise! so good! so noble! she put him upon a pinnacle, and worshipped him in a perfectly open and undisguised manner.

She valued herself because being his wife she must of course be a privileged person, and her manner, to *him* prettily deferential, was charmingly consequential to the rest of the world.

Able to speak German perfectly well by this time she continually addressed him in English, and shared in a belief prevalent among a good many people, that by completely upsetting and Germanizing your sentences you render the English language

very much easier of comprehension to the uninitiated, and this belief made her sentences extremely amusing, and it must be owned not a little obscure.

She was so charmed to hold Alice in her arms, so overflowing with delight on meeting the child she had so dearly loved and so often longed to see again, that Alice had nothing to do but submit to be hugged and admired in a way totally unprecedented in her experience.

Madame Knoplauch was also pleased to find that for the present she had father and daughter to herself; she felt quite sure that Mrs. Herbert would not like her, and if love begets love she certainly had no right to expect it.

A look from her husband made her soon invite Alice to accompany her upstairs, where she entered into a regular discussion with the landlady of the hotel upon the subject of her and her husband's accommodation, in a manner that convinced Alice how

much she owed to the German maid she had so reluctantly adopted as her attendant.

The rooms were agreed upon for exactly half the original sum asked, and so many things were specified on each side, that it was nearly half an hour before the luggage was established upstairs, and Madame Knoplauch's best cap recovered from the corner it had been occupying so lightly all the way from Desseldringen.

The ceremony of unpacking of course precluded much conversation, which was exactly what Madame Knoplauch wanted to avoid. Till she knew her husband's opinion of Mr. Herbert's condition, she was afraid of touching upon the subject with his daughter, and assisted by Lischen she managed to occupy herself and amuse Alice by unpacking and arranging her things in a manner methodical but perfectly comfortable.

The arrival of the Hofrath at the door of the room sent Alice downstairs.

Alone with her husband, Madame Knoplauch eagerly questioned him about the state of Mr. Herbert's health. "He is very ill indeed," answered he; "indeed his disease is so much farther advanced than I expected to find it, that cure is impossible; it is merely a question of time; my own feeling is that a very few weeks will, in all probability, end his life."

"His poor child!" said Madame Knoplauch, sorrowfully; "she has no idea of his actual state. She has been talking so brightly of their journey to Aix, and, though I avoided the subject of her father's health till I had spoken to you, I am quite sure she expects to see him recover."

"I find the doctor here told him of his danger, and that he has sent for Mrs. Herbert," said Herr Hofrath, thoughtfully; "and he is anxious not to alarm his daughter just yet."

"How long do you think he will live?" said Madame Knoplauch.

The Hofrath pointed to the dense foliage on the trees along the canal side.

"When those trees are leafless, Alice will be fatherless I think," he said.

Madame Knoplauch could not restrain her tears.

"You must calm yourself, my dear little wife," said the Hofrath, kindly. "Remember that Alice must be soothed and supported. Poor child! what a fine girl she is! If she likes it, by-and-by, she must come to us at Desseldringen, and we will both do our best to comfort her."

That thought in the meantime comforted his warm-hearted little wife; and, drying her tears, she went downstairs with a tolerably cheerful countenance.

CHAPTER XIII.

INTRODUCES MR. CECIL CHAMPNEYS.

Book in hand, with her thoughts far away, sat Madame Knoplauch, a few days after her arrival at Antwerp. The waving boughs of a linden-tree opposite the windows kept up a dancing, flickering shadow upon her lap—the pattering footsteps still passed up and down—the guttural voices of the people as they exchanged greetings — the slow, rumbling sound of the heavy trucks, and the noise of the deliberate horses—she heard every sound. Everything passing at the present time formed an accompaniment to the old thoughts, old memories, so forcibly recalled to her by Frank Herbert's prêsence.

Once again she saw herself arrive at Haughton so many years ago, and meeting the lovely, half-shy, half-imperious child that welcomed her as her future governess.

She saw her again riding up and down, to prove to her father that she could manage perfectly a horse pronounced too skittish for her; she saw her, with flushed cheeks, telling the story of Frank's attachment, and their engagement—and again in her bridal dress, looking so brilliant and so confident. Again she saw her—as she had seen her for the last time—with her beautiful hair cut off, and the grand mobile face, with its ever-changing expression, cold and calm, for ever stilled in death, with her beautiful boy beside her. Then she thought of Alice's future, of Frank's approaching fate; it was too sad. Long she remained thinking mournfully of all that had come and gone, and of all that was to come, feeling (as many feel) that the fate was hard, and wishing (as many wish)

that they could alter the dispensations of the Most High.

Short-sighted, as will one day be seen! Ungrateful, as will one day be proved!

She was roused by the sound of approaching voices, and she recognised Herr Knoplauch's voice; also Alice's, but there was a third.

She drew back a little from the window; she recognised Alice's clear, refined tones speaking as to a stranger.

"I am sorry I cannot ask you to make my father's acquaintance to-day," she said, "but he is very tired and unwell. To-morrow, perhaps——"

"To-morrow I hope to have the pleasure of seeing Mr. Herbert," said the strange voice, in manly, pleasant tones; "and when he has perused my credentials I trust I shall not be considered quite as a stranger."

A few words of farewell were exchanged, and a tall, athletic-looking young man passed

the window, as Alice and Madame Knoplauch came into the room.

"Papa," said Alice, with a bright smile; and, seeing that he was apparently sleeping, she went on to Madame Knoplauch, "We have had an adventure."

"I saw and heard a stranger," said Madame Knoplauch.

"He is a sort of cousin of my poor mother's," said Alice; "and has brought a letter from Lady Cecil, introducing him to papa. I told him papa was not well enough to see him to-day, and he gave me the letter and his card to give to my father. 'Mr. Cecil Champneys'—it is a very pretty name, isn't it?"

"Very pretty," assented Madame Knoplauch. "What is he like?"

"He is tall, and has a very nice face, I think," answered Alice; "and he has such a very pleasant frank manner, square shoulders, and straight hair," she continued, her antipathies running against the sloping-

shouldered and curly-headed youths of Braxfield; "and he is so very quiet and gentlemanlike."

Herr Hofrath corroborated all this in a quieter and less enthusiastic way, and Madame Knoplauch found herself building innumerable "castles in the air," firmly relying upon Lady Cecil's principles, and imagining that her well-known prudence would prevent her introducing any one to Miss Herbert's acquaintance who was not "eligible" in every sense of the word.

When Mr. Herbert woke, Lady Cecil's letter explained who Mr. Cecil Champneys was, and why he made Antwerp his resting-place for two or three days; but as Lady Cecil's letter was rather characteristic, it had better be quoted at length:—

"My dear Mr. Herbert,—I entrust this letter to a young cousin of mine, who is going to Antwerp to meet his *elder*

brother, and who is commissioned by me to report all about you and Alice. He is a thoroughly amiable young man, with a few crotchets; but all men with any character begin life by taking up views they are very glad to forget when they grow older. His *eldest* brother is charming, and though he has just had a grand love affair that ended unhappily, I suppose he will fall in love again some day. *I* never knew a man constant to his first love, though some people profess they are acquainted with such instances.

"I hope you are stronger than when you left me; and that Alice will have too much regard for her complexion to indulge in all that horrible grease the Germans always smother everything in. I feel quite sad when I think about it! Tell Alice, with my love, that that red-headed Mr. Maynard *has* proposed to the fairest of the two Lennox girls. She has, unfortunately, a great objection to red-haired men, but has asked for

a week to consider about it. The fact is, that she hopes in the interim Mr. Mainwaring may come to the point. He has made her rather conspicuous by his attentions, and paid her all those compliments that girls generally are subjected to when they have no mothers at their elbow to take meaningless impertinences *au sérieux*. If he does *not* propose she means to be sensible, and marry Mr. Maynard, which, in my opinion, makes it a settled thing. You *never* find a man paying compliments to a woman he really wants to marry.

"My best love to Alice, &c. &c. &c.

"I quite forgot to say that Mr. Champneys' mother is living, but *he is his own father!*"

This postscript puzzled Herr Hofrath not a little, and no explanation afforded by his wife seemed to make it clear to him.

Lady Cecil's letter puzzled Mr. Herbert almost as much in another way. Why she

should have gone out of her way to introduce a younger son to his daughter, who was by all accounts very prepossessing, seemed unaccountable; but it was impossible to discuss the subject before her, so after talking over Lady Cecil's news, and her views on the subject of Miss Lennox's marriage, the subject was allowed to drop.

CHAPTER XIV.

MADAME KNOPLAUCH'S ANXIETIES.

If Lady Cecil had tried she could not more effectually have destroyed Madame Knoplauch's peace of mind for the present.

Here was Bertha's fate over again! an amiable young man, with high principles and no money; a younger son, of course he would fall in love with Alice and Alice with him, and Mr. Herbert, unwarned by his own experiences, would made a faint opposition at first, be gradually gained over by his daughter's superior strength of will, and finally give his full consent, glad that she should have a protector before he closed his eyes for ever in this world.

When Mr. Cecil Champneys called, Mr.

Herbert was well enough to see him, and Madame Knoplauch was quite indignant when she found him so cordial in his manner to one who was so ineligible in her eyes for Alice.

Of course he admired Alice, and no wonder; and she got so exceedingly and unaccountably cross, as she sat and watched his smile and evident pleasure in Alice's society, that neither Mr. Herbert or his daughter could understand it. No one knows how she snubbed the very unconscious Mr. Cecil Champneys; he thought her a very rude little woman, and could not help wondering why the Herberts should allow themselves to be bored by her.

As is often the case, never was any one more thoroughly mistaken in the views, character, &c. of a total stranger than Madame Knoplauch.

Mr. Cecil Champneys, eager, enthusiastic and clever, had not the smallest taste, idea,

or intention of marrying for several years to come.

Not that he had not sometimes a dim and distant vision of a wife at a great distance of time, who would be devoted to him, realize his highest ideal, and be the mother of a few wonderful children; but he was far too sensible of the pleasure of independence at present, to think of being tied to a wife, or, in fact, tied down to anything, and nothing could well be more distinct than his present idea of his wife, as he intended her to be—and Alice Herbert.

No; all *his* visions of the remote matrimonial life were of a calm, phlegmatic and lymphatic being, rather large, extremely fair, who would admire and adore his energy and talents, without venturing to have either, except the one talent of appreciation! And Alice, with her bright eyes, her eager manner, and the quick way she took up what was said to her, had too little

repose, she was a little too much like himself to charm him. She was very handsome, but rather childish; no—certainly, Madame Knoplauch would have been spared much anxiety had she but known all this. But Madame Knoplauch only saw that he enjoyed talking and laughing with Alice, that Mr. Herbert was roused and pleased, and that if she did not interpose in some way, a great deal of harm would come of it.

It was hopeless thinking of enlisting her husband's sympathies. She knew that she could never make him understand why two young people should not fall in love, if they pleased, and marry also if they wished it; and the consent of the Herr Papa was given. To the frugal German mind, the question of means resolves itself into a very limited compass. Besides, the Herr Hofrath took a very romantic view of worldly wealth.

It therefore remained only for Madame

Knoplauch to do what she could about it, and whatever her intentions were, their effect was simply to render herself as disagreeable as it was well possible to be. If a walk to see some church, pictures, or curiosity was proposed she was instantly on the alert. *She* would go, and her husband was escort sufficient; they could not think of troubling Mr. Champneys. But if the expedition fell to the ground, her anxieties were as great as ever, for Alice and Mr. Champneys were sure to begin an apparently interminable conversation, much encouraged by Mr. Herbert's expressions of approval or disapproval from his sofa, and what was so provoking, she could not help herself cordially agreeing with his sentiments all the time.

One day she heard Alice ask him how many days he intended to spend in Antwerp, and she anxiously waited for his answer.

"I do not quite know," he answered,

with all the indifference of a perfectly idle man, with his time at his own disposal; there is so much more to see than I ever imagined in this quaint place."

"You like it on the whole?" said Alice.

"Very much indeed," he replied. "There is something about it that seems to throw a romance over trade; and there is a great deal of beauty. That sleepy river, with the heavily-laden boats gliding over it—every bit of it is a picture."

"A picture of laziness," said Alice, laughing. "Oh, the river! it moves too slowly, far too slowly for me. I like a rushing stream that carries all before it—that speaks of power."

Mr. Champneys smiled. "I, too, like power," he said, "but that river speaks to me of power of a certain kind. It is slow, if you like, but it is resistless; it is always going onward; nothing stops it; it is like a strong but hidden influence."

"I do not like the idea of a *hidden* influence," answered Alice; "I like knowing exactly what affects or influences me."

"We none of us can really know," rejoined Mr. Champneys; "we none of us can tell what influences us at times, or how we influence others—for good or evil," he added, half to himself, dreamily.

"That sleepy river is influencing *you* just now," said Alice, brightly; and Madame Knoplauch thought it wise to join in the conversation, and, as usual, managed effectually to stop it.

When Mr. Herbert had an opportunity he told Madame Knoplauch that she had evidently taken a dislike to Mr. Champneys; had she any reason, &c.?

"Oh," said that little woman to herself, "how terribly stupid men are about these things! Here is Alice's own father, who does not seem to be under the smallest apprehension, and his beautiful daughter is daily thrown into the society of that terrible

young man, who is doing all he can to make himself agreeable to her. I did not think you would consider it prudent to encourage him in any way," she said aloud, with a little pique.

"Encourage him! What do you mean?" asked he; "they have only met a few times; and when my wife's arrival enables me to leave this place they will very likely never meet again."

"And in the meantime, Alice will grow attached to him," said Madame Knoplauch, ironically, "and break her heart if they part in that way."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Herbert, impatiently; "Alice is not so foolish. Besides, by your account, the admiration is on his side."

"But it may arise on hers," said Madame Knoplauch; "and if it should she would be very unhappy."

"If it arose on hers," said Mr. Herbert, very earnestly, "if there was a chance

of Mr. Champneys being in earnest, I should die happy. I never met with a young man whose character I admire more. He is so frank that I feel as if I had known him for years. Alice must be happy with so good and upright a man. But you are deceiving yourself; in a few days it is impossible for any one to have become so much attached as you fancy. I wish—oh! how much I wish!—that I might live to see my child safe in the keeping of a good and kind man."

Madame Knoplauch was utterly astonished. "And the money," she said; "Mr. Champneys has nothing. I believe you do not remember——" Here she stopped; it was difficult to say to a man's face that she wished a brighter fate for his daughter than his wife had had.

Mr. Herbert understood her. "I know," he said, "what you are thinking about. You are thinking how strange it is, that having known the evils of a limited income,

I can bear to repeat them in my daughter's case; but the circumstances are widely different. Our—my mistake was in not waiting till we really knew our position—in the self-confidence that caused us to resent all advice as interference. I do not suppose that if Mr. Champneys thought of marrying, it would be without some profession, some provision; and Alice has had such a different experience. Her life and her mother's early life—what a contrast!"

"This is all idle talk," he continued; "Mr. Champneys likes talking to the child, and considers her a child. If she was a little older——I do not think he is the least in love with Alice. I wish—how much I wish!—that he was."

Madame Knoplauch could say no more; she could only marvel to herself, and endeavour to keep the two young people from entering into what she considered danger-

ous discussions; and her opinion of Lady Cecil, considered in all possible lights, was neither very flattering nor very kind, and would somewhat have astonished that lady had she known it.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. HERBERT ARRIVES AT ANTWERP.

In another day or two the hotel at Antwerp witnessed another arrival, another meeting. Mrs. Herbert arrived and took complete possession of the faculties of every member of the establishment for the first half hour.

As might have been expected from so discreet a person, she had taken the greatest care to wear her very oldest and shabbiest clothes for her voyage; and in naming *her* oldest and shabbiest clothes much may be understood.

The little round and commonplace-looking figure in its dingy attire was positively startling to Madame Knoplauch; *this* the successor to Bertha! this the wife of a

once fastidious man, and the step-mother of Bertha's daughter!

Few beautiful women, done all justice to in the way of dress, look *their best* when arriving from a crowded steamer and a rough passage, so that it is not to be expected that Mrs. Herbert did. Her own inexperience of travelling had aggravated the horrors of the journey. She had provided herself with nothing likely to contribute to her personal comfort; and when the gendarmes had boarded the steamer, she had so stoutly resisted their investigations, that their suspicions were aroused; they had insisted upon looking at everything, and did so. One small black bag in particular excited their curiosity. It contained a small bottle of brandy and a frilled nightcap. In despair she clutched her bag, and when obliged to open it, muttered something about *bonnet de nuit.*

It escaped observation, but not so her brandy bottle; the "ruffian" took it out,

shook it, remarking to his companion, "Drôle de bonnet de nuit, hein?" This completely finished Mrs. Herbert's measure of patience, and it was well for her that the care of her luggage engrossed her attention, as the *douaniers* understood her expressions of indignation only too well.

When she arrived, therefore, and saw her husband looking not so ill as she had expected, she soothed herself by recapitulating in full her adventures, griefs, and discomforts, to the immense amusement of Herr Hofrath, and the astonishment of his wife.

After a little while, however, and when the flush (always brought by excitement) had died out of Frank's cheek, she could not help being struck by the great change visible in her husband's appearance.

With all her faults, Mrs. Herbert was neither a heartless nor a bad woman, and all Madame Knoplauch's prejudices vanished, when she saw her thoroughly upset and heartily grieving in private. She could

forgive much in a woman who, after talking cheerfully to her husband, was to be found sobbing in her bed-room, and accusing herself of great neglect for having been so slow to believe in so serious an illness; and much to Madame Knoplauch's surprise, she found herself comforting and sympathizing with the very woman of whom she had thought so bitterly!

Now that Mrs. Herbert had come, nothing need detain them at Antwerp, and every arrangement was made for their departure. But when it came to the point, Frank found himself shrinking from a long journey, and after consulting together, it was found that it would be useless to urge him to take a step he felt unequal to, and a compromise was effected. In his various wanderings round the place, Mr. Champneys had been much struck by the situation of a sort of superior farm-house, and had made acquaintance with the inhabitants; he found that they had several rooms of good size,

and fitted up with tolerable comfort, that were usually let to summer visitors, and as they were clean and inexpensive, and it was an object to get Mr. Herbert out of the town to a quieter residence, these rooms were taken, and the whole party adjourned there.

The picturesque house, and its cheerful, homely owner, delighted Alice, and she watched with great hope for the expected improvement in her father's health.

As day succeeded day, and she found his strength diminish instead of increase, when she could note his fading looks, and trace the progress of his illness from hour to hour, then her spirits drooped; reluctantly she began to be less sanguine about his recovery, and though not imagining how near the parting was, without allowing herself to say that she must part with him, she began to feel that soon she might be very anxious about him, she began to realize his danger.

Alas! for the loneliness that would then be her lot. When the conviction forced itself upon her, she threw herself upon her bed and tried to stifle her agonized and passionate cries. What a life lay before her, deprived of him who had been her *all!* Without a friend of her own age, it looked desolate enough; and in the first bitterness of anticipated bereavement, her prayer was to be taken when he was taken. What would she have to live for?

* * * *

Mrs. Herbert, whose best qualities were all called forth by her husband's illness, was not a far-sighted person, or one who was competent to form an opinion, except where she had a beaten track to follow.

Thoroughly gentlemanlike, and sorry for the approaching trial he saw before her, Mr. Champneys, who still lingered in Antwerp, had won her regard completely. She was unaccustomed to the high-bred tone and deferential manner of the class he

belonged to, towards almost all women, and took it as a personal and special compliment to herself. Without questioning Madame Knoplauch, or intruding upon Alice's confidence, she took for granted directly that Mr. Champneys and Alice were desperately in love with each other, and that it was a very good thing. It was an unfortunate mistake for her to make, and it did a good deal of mischief, as will be seen by-and-by.

It was just at this crisis that old Mr. Clott's illness terminated fatally; and, to Mr. Herbert's great astonishment, it was found that, after doing every justice to his wife in the arrangements he made for her, he left the life interest of his share in the manufactory to his niece, and the principal to Alice, who was to receive a certain sum yearly from her step-mother's income. The money was to be realized as soon as it was possible to do so advantageously; and it

was expected that instead of the twenty thousand pounds anticipated, it would amount to nearly double. No reason was assigned by old Mr. Clott for this will; he had always been extremely fond of Alice, but had never said a word to lead any one to believe that he meant her eventually to become his heiress.

Mrs. Herbert was but human, and it was natural at first to feel as if she had been set aside for a stranger in blood; but the actual pleasure of having an increase of income was too great to make her mourn over anything which would not affect her during her life.

Mr. Herbert's joy and gratitude were unspeakable; to have his darling's position so completely altered, to feel that for *her* all depressing feelings connected with money matters were ended, made his whole heart thrill with thankful emotion.

"It will not alter Alice's position with

Mr. Champneys," said Mrs. Herbert, as she sat talking over the great change in their prospects.

"What position?" inquired Mr. Herbert.

"Why, my dear, they are desperately in love with each other."

Mr. Herbert smiled. "You women, I suppose, know best; but he never gives *me* the idea of being desperately in love with Alice."

"Oh! my dear, it is *quite* evident; and he is so very charming. Why should he remain in Antwerp, kicking his heels, and having nothing earthly to detain him, unless he was in love?"

This certainly looked like it.

"I wish I could think so," said her husband; "but his manner——"

"Manner is nothing," said Mrs. Herbert, decidedly. "Why, I never should have guessed, from your manner, that you were desperately in love with *me* when you proposed to me."

What could Mr. Herbert say?

The argument he considered most powerful was the fact of this young man's remaining at Antwerp for no ostensible reason; and he gradually came to the conclusion that his wife and Madame Knoplauch must be right, and that he was as blind in this case as he had been when Mrs. Herbert No. 1 had expressed her conviction of the Herr Hofrath's attachment, and when he had said "Nonsense," with so much emphasis, to find out, after all, his wife was right.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALICE HERBERT BECOMES AN HEIRESS AND AN ORPHAN.

When Madame Knoplauch was told of the good and unexpected fortune that had overtaken Alice, her delight was unbounded. All her anxieties on the score of money matters were over. Alice might become attached to Mr. Cecil Champneys as soon as ever she pleased; now Madame Knoplauch thought him a most excellent young man, so she assured her, and Alice was a little puzzled when she reflected upon the very peculiar way in which she had invariably shown her appreciation of him hitherto.

Madame Knoplauch, though she considered it her duty to discourage any one

who endeavoured to gain Alice's affections, if he was penniless, was quite unworldly enough to be indifferent as to who had the money, provided that there really was money somewhere, and she became both friendly and gracious to Mr. Champneys, who was if possible more at a loss than before to explain her variable moods, but as the change was a pleasant one, he did not trouble himself much to look deep into its cause.

Alice herself was altogether the person upon whom the change in her prospects had the least effect.

Her father was so invariably silent upon a subject always distasteful to him, and fraught with very painful associations, that she mistook his reserve not unnaturally for complete indifference, and her step-mother so evidently over-rated the value of wealth (especially according to Lady Cecil's ideas) that she knew very little about it.

She was pleased as a child might be,

that now she might get things she either wished to procure for her father or herself; now a little beauty might be introduced into the life at home; and she planned how she could contrive to displace those things that had most offended her sense of refinement. But as to giving her a better position in the world, of its use in allowing her a free and less restricted sphere of action, she never dreamt.

Mr. Champneys was extremely glad for Alice's sake. He knew quite well the difference it had made in her future, but it was a sign (had one been needed), of his not being the least in love with her, that it never struck him as of the slightest importance to *him;* he had no selfish views, she was like an amusing younger sister, with whom he talked and laughed on those perfectly easy terms that so effectually prevent all thoughts of anything "nearer and dearer." They had little differences of opinion, and supported their several views

with all their natural warmth of character, and were often quite as wanting in politeness as those brothers and sisters who are sure enough of each other's fraternal affection not to stand upon any ceremony; they were never in the very least sentimental.

Herr Hofrath seeing things by the light of his honest but not very vivid or imaginative mind, had long ago settled that they were deeply and romantically in love, or they never would care for being so much together. Many a day this thought had given patience to his heavy feet as he sauntered along behind them in some old church, the very images of which were his utter detestation. He chewed the cud of reflection, pondering on the immense slowness of *ces anglais* in these matters, with a favourable exception on behalf of his wife; but then she was not like all other people.

It was unfortunate that Mr. Herbert should have been so completely deceived by these constant allusions to an understanding

of some kind between his daughter and Mr. Champneys, but he was too ill now to be able to draw conclusions for himself; surely if his wife was wrong, Madame Knoplauch, and above all her matter-of-fact husband, could not also be at fault; and insensibly he looked upon it as one of those things that was simply not brought to an issue by appealing to him, for fear of the consequences of over-excitement.

This was the state of matters when, as the Hofrath had foreseen, he became suddenly and alarmingly worse, and all (Alice included) felt that now indeed the last had come. For two days he lay apparently unconscious, and then there was a slight rally. In a sort of dream the voices he recognised close to him were those of Alice and Mr. Champneys, who was taking his turn of watching.

The dying man, impressed by all he had heard, summoned all his strength and joined their hands, murmuring a blessing on them

both, and Alice had no time to explain her false position to him, choking back her sobs in the endeavour. She was startled by a cry from her step-mother, and in a moment the conviction fell upon her heart like ice—she was now indeed an orphan.

* * * *

After her father's death, Alice Herbert secluded herself in her own room; the shock had been terrible to her, and mingled with the wretched feeling of loneliness, was the recollection of the humiliating position in which she had been placed, and which afforded her no ray of comfort.

Even supposing that her poor father had received from Mr. Champneys some statement as to his feelings, hers had never been taken into consideration, they had been taken for granted. And after all, did she love this man with the love she ought to have for her future husband? No; she liked him immensely, but he was too dictatorial, too full of plans, thoughts, and

wishes, in which she could not enter. Like most young girls, her beau idéal was totally different from any one she had ever seen. Like Cecil Champneys well enough to marry him? Never.

Madame Knoplauch, who did her utmost to soothe and comfort her, was puzzled by her despondent tone. Surely, she thought, the new joy and hope that must be hers, must in a little while chase away this extreme sorrow. Grief she could understand, but not the utter hopelessness of Alice's reference to her future life; and she talked to her husband about it.

The excellent Hofrath thought he quite understood it, but said nothing for the present. The young man, he thought, has held back out of delicacy, and has not expressed his intentions. It remains for me to put things right for these young people; *I* will speak to him.

The room occupied by Alice Herbert was one looking out on a little garden, whose

well worn path was frequented by the Hofrath when indulging in the habitual morning pipe. It was the sunny side of the house, and, as is often the case abroad, the green outside blinds were constantly closed to shade the room, while the windows were thrown wide open. Lying on the sofa near the window, and enjoying the cool autumnal air that fanned her face, Alice heard Mr. Champneys join the Hofrath, and the conversation between them went on without her heeding it till she was roused by the sound of her own name. Mr. Champneys was inquiring how she was. She noticed a slight hesitation in his voice, and, without intending it, she heard all that passed.

"Alice loved her father very tenderly," said Herr Hofrath, "and the shock has been a severe one to her, poor child!"

"It must be a great grief to her," said Mr. Champneys, and then there was a little pause. "Do you think she will like to see

me before I go?" he continued, rather in a constrained voice.

"Before you go!" echoed Herr Hofrath; "are you thinking of going *now?*"

"I am afraid I must," answered his companion.

"But you will arrange to meet again soon?" said Herr Hofrath.

"I do not know; I cannot say," said Mr. Champneys; "it depends. M. Knoplauch, it is better to be frank with you. I am unfortunately placed in a very trying position, and to tell you the truth, I do not see my way quite clearly. When Mr. Herbert was dying, acting under some misapprehension, he joined my hand and his daughter's together."

"Well!" said Herr Hofrath, inquiringly.

"Till that moment," continued Mr. Champneys, "it never occurred to me that so serious a meaning could be put upon our intimacy. I admire Alice Herbert, I suppose every one would, and I like her, as one

likes a very pleasant cousin—a sister; but of love, love such as one hopes to feel for the woman one makes one's wife, I have none!"

Herr Knoplauch's voice rang out with an indignant tone in it—"If this is your opinion, if these are your feelings, Mr. Champneys, you must allow me to say that I consider you have behaved very ill indeed; you have for weeks been making yourself as agreeable as possible to this young lady, and now you refuse and go into metaphysics, and admire her and like, but do not 'love' her. I do not pretend to understand your English manners, but in my country if a young man were to act thus——"

"You must hear me out," interrupted Mr. Champneys. "I think Alice herself would be the first to acknowledge that I have never given her reason to believe that I was 'in love' with her. I have, and always shall have, the greatest interest in her fate, circumstances have drawn us near

each other; it is impossible to forget all we witnessed together! But I think you are utterly mistaken in her views, if, as I gather from you just now, you fancy my going will be a source of sorrow to her; she has never by word or look shown me that she cares for me, beyond being on good terms as a relation and countryman in a time of trial. I am in no position to marry just now. I have no profession, and my expectations are too far off to be of use to me. However, if you think that I have unconsciously created an interest in the heart of Alice I will put her affection to the test. I will ask her to be my wife, I will do anything rather than let her imagine that I have behaved dishonourably!"

"I honour you then," said Herr Hofrath, warmly; "if the child does not love you—poof! my visions are at an end. If she does——"

"If she does," said Mr. Champneys, "she shall never have occasion to repent that

she has shown me so much consideration. "No," he continued, in some agitation, "if Alice loves me, if she becomes my wife, it shall not be my fault if she ever regrets it!"

And Alice heard it all, and lying with a burning face hid between her hands, sought relief from the bitter emotions that crowded upon her in tears.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE "REJECTED ADDRESSES."

When Mr. Herbert's funeral was over, Mr. Champneys sought Madame Knoplauch. He felt that *she* was most likely to understand Alice's wishes and feelings; and he begged her to ask if he might be allowed to say "good-bye" in person before leaving for England.

Alice heard the request in silence, and with a composure that Madame Knoplauch could not understand. However, after a moment or two, she agreed to meet Mr. Champneys, and went downstairs.

It was impossible for the two to meet without remembering when and how they had last parted; but Alice, mastering her

agitation for fear that it should be misunderstood, shook hands with him, kindly and quietly, and sat down. She saw in an instant that, as far as self-possession went, she had much the best of it, and this gave her confidence and self-command. In a kind and friendly way, she discussed his journey, and asked about his brother's movements and his own plans.

"Mamma will go to England soon," she said. "I am to pay Madame Knoplauch a visit, and then I also return to England."

Mr. Champneys was very unreasonable; he could not bear being treated with this utter indifference. The Hofrath was a fool, and he was a still greater one. This calm and self-possessed girl "in love" with him!—it was nonsense. Since his conversation with the Hofrath he had tormented himself by imagining how the farewell would take place; he had pictured to himself Alice's lovely face quivering with suppressed emotion as

she bade him "good-bye;" and then he would kindly and gently speak to her of her future life, and ask her to be his wife. How her expression would change *if* she loved him!—and insensibly this picture had dwelt in his mind till he had quite looked forward to it as a reality.

It is probable that if Alice *had* accepted him he would have felt "*tied*," and looked upon himself as having rather sacrificed his liberty to a girl too easily won. As it was, it was a little mortifying to find how many thoughts he had wasted upon one so evidently indifferent to him, and it was with a little pique that he dwelt upon his departure, and the absence of any plan that might bring them again together.

"I shall be very sorry," said Alice, with the utmost calmness, "if we are never to meet again; we have been so much together that I can never look upon you as a stranger."

Cecil Champneys bit his lip.

"I should be very sorry to lose sight of *you* completely," he said; "but I fancied from your manner that your seeing me again was a matter of the most perfect indifference to you."

"Oh, no," said Alice, "I shall always, as I said, like to hear about you, and the success of the plans you have so often talked to me about. I dare say I shall hear about you through Aunt Cecil."

"Then you do take a little interest in me?" said the young man, who was beginning to wish that he *had* succeeded in making her "care" for him.

"A great deal of interest," returned Alice, in a kind and rather sisterly manner; "my father liked you so much," she added, saying the very thing she had not intended to say.

The reference was unwise; tears that would not be restrained rushed to her eyes, and—Cecil Champneys was carried beyond himself.

"Alice," he exclaimed, "tell me—tell me you do care a little for me — that you do feel our parting—that you will be my wife?"

"Never!" said Alice, as she rose, and regained her self-command. "How can you ask it? *You do not love me,* Mr. Champneys!"

"I never knew *how* much till now," he exclaimed, with great agitation. "I have been an idiot, and blind. I do—I *do* love you," he said. "Oh, what can I do to prove it to you?"

"I think I know your feelings," said Alice, with difficulty speaking in a natural voice. "My poor father, acting under some great misunderstanding, joined our hands, and you, Cecil, you would wish to act honourably and fairly to me; and thinking that the misapprehension under which *he* laboured might be shared by others—by me, in short—you offer to make me your wife. But, Cecil, you have never

tried to make me love you; and though I do like you, and though I should be very sorry not to see you again, I do not love you as I suppose a woman ought to love the man she marries, and I do not think we should be happy together."

Cecil Champneys was completely taken by surprise. Though the tone was womanly and gentle, it was so decided that he felt at the moment as if all his wishes had been blighted. The moment he saw that Alice did not care for him was the moment he felt as if all his hopes of happiness depended upon her; and he made one more effort.

"You are right," he said, "in some of what you say; but though I did *not* know it till now—though I had done injustice to my own feelings—yet *now* I feel as if, unless I win you, my hopes of happiness are gone. Oh, Alice! believe me—I cannot tell you how dear you are to me! Give me a little hope—let me be near you—and

you shall never have occasion to say I have not tried to win your love."

"No," answered Alice, moving towards the door, and holding out her hand for a farewell, "we will say 'good-bye' here. You misunderstand your own feelings; at all events, I know my own. We shall be very good friends, I hope, and I trust we may meet again. We have gone through much together, and we are 'cousins,' you know. Good-bye." Her hand was seized and passionately kissed, and she left him.

M. Knoplauch and his wife talked it over by themselves, without being able to come to any correct conclusion. The former, indeed, allowed that English manners were utterly beyond his comprehension, and satisfied himself in that way; but Madame Knoplauch never could understand it. Alice never pined, but she was evidently vexed or grieved about something—at

least, she was a long time recovering her spirits. Madame Knoplauch was much divided about her wishes and hopes for her. Now that she would be eventually so well off, her marrying a younger son was quite a thing to forgive; but she should like her to marry brilliantly. It was quite evident she had not cared for Mr. Champneys (for that gentleman had told her everything before he left), and in the meantime she must enjoy her society and be in peace, for the chances were quite against her seeing any one to please her at the quiet country town of Desseldringen.

Mrs. Herbert sailed for England, and went back to Braxfield, where she had much to do, and the Hofrath and his wife returned to their house at Desseldringen, accompanied by Alice, where the former found much to occupy him in undoing the bad practices of his substitute; and the latter had a melancholy pleasure in intro-

ducing Bertha's child to all the places where her mother had been, and dwelling with the minuteness of affection on every fact, every incident that still dwelt in her memory.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SURPRISES.

Lady Cecil, when she forwarded that letter of introduction which had been the original cause of Mr. Cecil Champneys' intimacy with the Herberts, had not in any way acted against her natural instincts.

Madame Knoplauch might have trusted her, but she did not know her very well, and of course had no clue to guide her to a correct judgment.

Mr. Cecil Champneys *was* a younger son, but his eldest brother, Lord Champneys, inherited property with the title, and he could not succeed to a baronetcy and property that, owing to one or two deaths during the lapse of years, seemed now likely

to devolve upon his younger brother. No one in the family could hold the two together.

This property, &c., was at Haughton. Sir Luke had two sons, one of whom died at school, and the only remaining one was of a feeble and sickly constitution, not likely to live long.

Lady Cecil heard this from a friend who had met the Haughtons abroad, and finding that Mr. Champneys intended to go abroad for a few months, thought there could be no harm in allowing him to see something of Alice Herbert.

She had a great respect for Mr. Herbert, and had latterly a sincere liking for him, but she imagined him crotchetty and whimsical, with certain "republican" ideas, and conceived that if she hinted the idea that Mr. Champneys was a good match for his daughter, he would probably show his independence by seeing nothing of him. Under these circumstances she merely men-

tioned his being a younger son, and considered she had acted with a tact and discretion highly deserving of praise. She had quite made up her mind that young Haughton would die; and as on the only occasion on which she had seen him he had amused himself by making satirical remarks about her to her very face, she really did not so very much care, though of course she always spoke about the end she anticipated as a "*very* sad" thing, with a lowered voice and quite a decent show of feeling; but then the world has to be considered, and some show of sorrow is required when relations expire, however little may be felt. "Poor young Haughton!" was a phrase common enough now on her lips, and was quite in her head when she sent Mr. Champneys to make the acquaintance of the Herberts.

She also managed to interest the young man in question about them before he had ever seen them. She dwelt upon Mr. Her-

bert's love of retirement, and his dislike to strangers, till she felt that the civility he would owe to her introduction would be received by him as an unexpected and personal compliment. Altogether, she thought she had done very well. She knew Cecil's weak point about looks, and trusted all would be right in the end.

Little enough could she gather from the few lines beginning "My dear Aunt," and ending in a very large "Affectionate nephew," with a signature that took up half a note sheet. If Alice was mentioned it was easily and naturally; nothing could, she felt, be going on between these two, and it was rather provoking! Then came Mr. Herbert's death, and the constraint Lady Cecil had been constantly expecting became evident; but a parting was mentioned also, and this did not look well. Instead of returning to England, some obscure village near a remarkable trout

stream in the Tyrol was casually mentioned as his next destination.

Lady Cecil acknowledged to herself that this was not promising. Young men with the option of being tolerably near the object of their affections, did not generally go to the Tyrol; some hitch had occurred: a touch of her father's independence, or of her mother's love of acting for herself. Lady Cecil wished she knew. She could not help wishing the legislature gave some power to relations; it was such a pity to see girls throwing away opportunities. She could not make out what she had better do. Write? No, as she knew nothing, she might say the very thing she ought not to say. Lady Cecil felt her position was a very hard one. She was so afraid of doing harm, that she wisely left things alone for the present.

Nothing could be kinder than her letter of condolence to Alice. She inquired about

her future plans, reminding her that so long as she herself lived, she might make her house a home whenever it suited her; and, except a very slight reference to Mr. Champneys, she never mentioned him at all. She was rewarded by a cordial and affectionate letter from Alice, who told her that her step-mother was not very well, and had returned to Braxfield; and that after her own visit to the Knoplauchs was over, she was going to join her. Quite right and proper, thought Lady Cecil, for a time, only it is a pity that handsome girl should be poked away at that horrible little place. But on her way there she must rest in London; and so Alice, after leaving Desseldringen, arrived at Lady Cecil's, accompanied by Lischen.

They had not been long together before the subject so near Lady Cecil's heart came uppermost.

"Cecil Champneys is a nice lad, is he not?" she asked, indifferently.

Alice could command her voice, but could not help colouring. "Very nice indeed," she said.

"I hope he did not bore you all," continued her great-aunt, who was watching her countenance narrowly. "He has peculiar views, which is quite the fashion. All young men have peculiar views now; it is as much a matter of course with them, as tailoring with their ancestors. *They* were absorbed in their elaborate costumes, and young men now are absorbed, or affect to be, in some theory which is revolutionizing something or somebody."

"I do not think Mr. Champneys affects anything," said Alice. "He seems thoroughly in earnest."

"Ah!" interrupted Lady Cecil, "earnestness—that's another word always on their lips. Every one must be earnest now. I dare say it's all very right, but it sounds a little fatiguing. It reminds me, my dear, of the old rhyme, 'All work and no play

makes Jack a dull boy.' The modern Jacks are very dull boys indeed, to my fancy."

"Mr. Champneys is not dull," said Alice. "We thought him amusing."

"Possibly, my dear. I dare say his plans would sound very amusing to you. What is his great hobby just now? I often wish," continued Lady Cecil, in a half laughing voice, "that he would fall in love; an unhappy attachment is a wonderful thing for upsetting fanciful theories, and making men practical. Now, if Cecil Champneys were to fall in love, though that is not very likely quite yet—if he were to propose to a girl, and be rejected, I should immediately begin to have hopes of him."

The face of Alice Herbert was a satisfactory solution to Lady Cecil of part of her difficulties.

"My dear child," she exclaimed, "you look as guilty as if *you* had acted the part of 'cruel damsel.' Did that excellent Cecil

make himself miserable on your account, and why did it come to nothing?"

It was very difficult for Alice to make Lady Cecil comprehend that it had come to something, if by something she meant a proposal; but it was more than difficult for Lady Cecil to realize that he had been refused. Here actually everything she had most wished for had come about; her castle in the air had actually become a fact, and was blown away by the wrongheadedness of the very girl for whom it was so desirable, in Lady Cecil's opinion, to provide a future. Lady Cecil could have cried with vexation. She could hardly speak calmly to Alice when she *did* begin to realize how matters stood. How little she knew what her position would be! but, even if she did, how was any one to know that it would make her different. Why, thought Lady Cecil, in her despair, why was not Alice like other young women? why was she not to take a sensible view of things? Why was *her* great-niece to

turn out romantic, and expect impossible things——?

"You are not old enough, or sensible enough," she said, when she found her voice again, "to appreciate the fatal consequences of the step you have taken, without choosing to refer to me, or any one else. I cannot understand you."

"Surely," exclaimed Alice, her spirit rising at Lady Cecil's tone and manner, "you can understand my not rushing into so serious a thing as an engagement so hastily. I did not think I liked Mr. Champneys well enough to marry him, and I told him so; and," she added in a lower voice, "I did not think he really loved me, and I said that to him also."

Lady Cecil lost all patience. "Good heavens! child, how provoking you are!" she exclaimed, angrily. "Why (even supposing you have the bad taste not to like Cecil well enough to marry him) should he propose to you if he did not like you? I

never heard so much nonsense in all my life. You must have given him encouragement."

Alice was silent, and the ivory paper-cutter went patpatting the table, and denoting Lady Cecil's impatience.

"What in the world you expect I do not pretend to understand," she continued. "Here is a young man, with every good quality possible, and very good prospects, asking you to marry him; and there you are, with nothing definite to look forward to, coolly, and without any reason in the world, setting him aside, as if the world was before you to pick and choose from. It really is beyond me. Understand," she said, after a moment's pause, "if, after my endeavour to rescue you from a probably very hard life, you deliberately throw away your chance in this way, I really will cease to take trouble about you; and," she solemnly added, "if you eventually marry a horrible, curly-headed Braxfield counter-

jumper, from that moment I shall feel quite justified in dropping you altogether!"

Never in her life had so serious a storm burst upon Alice Herbert's head; but the effect was not exactly what her great-aunt anticipated. Rising with a self-command that would have done credit to a far older person, she said, "You are very angry just now, Aunt Cecil, and I daresay say more than you would if you were calmer. Besides, there are circumstances——"

"Well?" inquired her aunt, ironically.

"There are some things that perhaps I ought to have told you first," continued Alice, hesitating a little. She knew that, when Lady Cecil was told of her prospects, she would consider that she was justified, at least in some degree, in not at once settling her fate, and yet she did not know how to say this without, perhaps, offending her. "My step-mother's uncle, old Mr. Clott, is dead," she said.

Lady Cecil quite started. "The old

uncle from whom Mrs. Herbert had expectations ?"

"Yes," said Alice, "that is one reason mamma went to Braxfield."

Lady Cecil's face was good to see. "Well, my dear," she said, softening her voice, and what has he left Mrs. Herbert—anything?"

"About forty thousand pounds," said Alice, in a matter-of-fact tone. "The stock, &c., has been sold, and I believe has realized that."

"Forty thousand pounds!" Lady Cecil could hardly speak. "Forty thousand pounds!—my dearest Alice, what a delightful old man. What — what a very fine character! You are right, my dear child, to go to your step-mother. I dare say she is much attached to you. Is it her own to do as she likes with ? Child, why did you never tell me this before? Go to her; of course you are quite right."

"It is not hers to leave to anybody," said

Alice, beginning to understand Lady Cecil's character a little, and taking a mischievous pleasure in tantalizing her.

"What an absurd will!" exclaimed Lady Cecil, dreadfully provoked. "Are they going to do anything about it? I dare say he was a very odd old man. I dare say it would be quite easy to prove that he was eccentric, and no doubt a clever lawyer might pick holes in it. There is——Let me see, Mr. Carter is very old, but he has his wits about him. For your father's sake——"

"For my father's sake I do not think Mr. Carter would do anything to upset the will," said Alice; "it *is* very odd, but—Aunt Cecil, after mamma, if she dies before me—all this money is left to me."

Lady Cecil was perfectly stunned.

"Left to you, my dear darling Alice," she exclaimed, hysterically, and absorbing her great-niece in her capacious arms. "An heiress, absolutely an heiress; of

course you were quite right about Cecil Champneys, you may do a thousand times better; he *is* crotchetty, my dear, and a little self-willed. Oh! my dear child, what a perfectly delightful thing altogether. I think I never was so happy before."

Alice submitted with a dutiful spirit to her aunt's ecstasies, but she was only human, and she could not resist a little retaliation. "If," she said, gravely "you really think I must have given Mr. Champneys encouragement, I suppose I——"

"My dearest child," exclaimed Lady Cecil, "on re-consideration, it was really a little forward of Cecil to ask you. I have no doubt that he had some idea of this; was Mr. Clott's will talked about before he proposed?"

"I assure you, Aunt Cecil," said Alice, most earnestly, "this money had nothing to do with it; Mr. Champneys is the last person in the world who would be influenced by such a thing. Only to you," she added,

"and only because you pressed me so hard —would I ever have said so much; and I am sure for my sake, for both," she added, "you will not speak of it to any one."

Lady Cecil gave her a kiss, and released her; she was at the moment so busy regretting that the Duchess of Branlingham's eldest son was too young—what a marriage *that* would be! Her thoughts spoke out as Alice was leaving the room. "Putting aside the great consideration of your dislike to young Champneys, my dear, it is *so* desirable to extend our connexions, and, though only remotely connected after all, it would be a little like—well something like travelling in a circle, which I believe is always thought a stupid thing to do, by men who have studied the subject and give lectures."

It was not worth while to explain anything to Lady Cecil, but Alice felt a little guilty. No; she certainly did not dislike Cecil Champneys.

CHAPTER XIX.

HAUGHTON HALL.

Winter was drawing near; the dull haze of a dreary November day was giving place to night; the air was still and laden with moisture; and there was something depressing in the gaunt look of the bare trees with the very few leaves yet clinging to them—devoid of beauty in themselves—shrivelled up beyond recognition. There was a certain grandeur in the massive branches that in seeming confusion tossed their arms up heavenwards as if protesting against their desolation; but it was a melancholy grandeur, speaking more of the past than of the future—more full of unspoken regret than of whispered hope.

The very grass lay dank and spiritless, and the fallen leaves were too wet to echo a passing footstep crisply, as is their wont at times.

Lights were gleaming from some of the windows at Haughton, and a group of three congregated at one of them.

Two girls and their brother—the latter a delicate, almost peevish-looking young man. The reclining posture spoke of ill health, but it was not till he moved that you saw he was lame and deformed. His voice was sharp and told its tale of continuous pain.

"Open the window," he exclaimed; "how can we hear anything with it shut?"

One of his sisters began to remonstrate, the other threw open the window, and the damp chill air rushed in, and made him cough. Very irritably he asked them to shut it again, and dragged himself across the room to a sofa, which was evidently his usual resting-place.

Mary, his eldest sister, and Mildred, the youngest of the three, followed him.

Mary, or Molly as she was usually called, was one of those girls that it is so difficult to describe. She had so little character that she changed her opinions and sentiments to suit whoever happened to speak to her.

Selfish, she was too indolent ever to contradict any one; but though she always said "yes" very gently (especially to her mother) she took very good care that if compliance gave her the slightest trouble it was never carried out. Poor Lady Haughton had never yet discovered that the invariable "Yes, dear mamma" simply meant nothing, if Molly found that the "yes" involved the slightest possible exertion. She was considered "so very amiable" by almost every one, except a few inconveniently prickly characters, who openly expressed a wish to hear a good wholesome, flat contradiction as a variety; but prickly characters were not at all Molly Haughton's

forte, and she generally avoided them. In person she was slight, with a bending figure, that reminded one a little of a willow, and her face was neither very plain or very striking; she was always beautifully dressed, and understood perfectly how to make the most of herself—a talent which is worth a good many degrees of beauty. In this, but in nothing else, her sister Mildred resembled her. She was round, fair, and not actually as good-looking as her sister, but she possessed the most perfectly happy appreciation of herself that it was possible to have. Neither snubbings direct or indirect, ill-natured comments repeated to her, and corroborated by personal slights, ever touched her. Every trifling and idle compliment was treasured and magnified, and things a girl like Alice Herbert would have shrunk from and resented as an impertinence, were accepted by her as a proof of admiration, if of nothing more.

Vanity—if vanity simply means undue

appreciation, or over-valuing oneself, there never was so vain a girl! She considered herself very charming, and smiled on the world with an unruffled composure till it smiled back again. All this would have signified very little, and would have been only amusing, but she possessed that restless spirit so unaccountable to a generous person. She was always endeavouring to show her dearest or most intimate friends how much less clever, less prosperous, or less admired they were than she was.

Beginning with the shallow excuse of thinking it kind or right, she was perpetually pointing out to one person a hitherto undetected slight, and making it appear something very much to be lamented by her exaggerated expressions of sympathy, or lamenting a want of tact in another, and carefully pointing out a supposed marked dislike on the part of somebody else. She had the happy knack

of lowering every one insensibly in their own estimation, and prefaced by an apology that did not cover the impertinence, the repetition of some disparaging remark. It is very easy to make the most sensible people a little uncomfortable by this means —not to speak of severed friendships and a thousand other things.

The mischief that such a character can make is naturally beyond conception!

Her brother Edward was the one person in the world of whom she felt a little afraid, probably because he knew her really better than any one else did. He had sounded the depths of her character, and learnt its shallowness. He was beyond the reach of her usual weapons, and often his steady and sarcastic look checked her when she was dilating upon the amount of "devotion" she had received.

According to her, every one was "devoted" to her, and no one had ever inspired so many hopeless attachments.

These were the relations amongst whom Alice Herbert was coming for the first time; and, as they sat expecting her, they discussed her antecedents according to their several ideas upon the subject.

Sir Luke, who had entered the room, was still a hale, active looking man, aged in the expression of his face, but in little else. His step still was firm and elastic, and, except for the whitened hair, and a few lines about the brow, very much what he had been twenty years before.

He was very happy that at length poor Bertha's child was really coming to him. His open-hearted, affectionate nature had yearned to see a girl so desolate, as far as home ties went, and he expressed his great wish to his children that Alice might really feel at home with them. Nothing had grieved Sir Luke more than his inability to help the Herberts in their hour of need, though he knew very little what their troubles and anxieties had really

been. Too restless to remain quiet in the drawing-room, he left the room.

In a few moments the noise of a carriage was heard, then the ring and bustle of an arrival; and Sir Luke's voice calling loudly to his daughters, made them go into the hall, where they found Alice submitting with a very good grace to the embraces of Sir Luke. Turning round to receive the greetings of her cousins, they were struck with astonishment. Taller by a good deal than they were, and very largely made, her upright figure and rounded throat gave her that dignified look that it generally does. A low broad brow, and splendid eyes; a well cut nose and mouth, and a firm chin; a clear and rather pale complexion, and an expression of the most perfect repose, made her as charming a figure as it was possible to be. Her hair was a rich dark golden brown, without a wave to disturb the outline of her beautiful head; and as she moved towards her

cousins they felt as if suddenly presented to some empress who had condescended to appear amongst them.

Alice inquired for Lady Haughton, who had been roused from her daily "rest" before dinner by the bustle. She came forward and received her with great warmth for her, but her ideas did not come out in words till they were safely in the drawing-room, when she said, "You are very like your mother, my dear—only a great deal bigger," and relapsed into her normal state of being "very sleepy."

Alice, while she answered all the inquiries about her journey, &c. &c., was obliged to exercise unusual self-restraint. When she found herself standing in her mother's old home, thoughts came crowding upon her: there, by the marble chimney-piece, had her mother probably stood, as she was standing now; and there had she and Mr. Herbert talked hopefully of the future—a future to be passed together. She found

herself returning rather short answers, which were luckily attributed to fatigue, and followed Lady Haughton's advice about going to her room. "I would show you the way," said her ladyship, "but the stairs tire me so much."

Alice begged not to be treated with so much ceremony. She was longing to make friends with the nearest female relations she had, and she was, above all, longing to be alone, that she might indulge in the luxury of thinking about the many changes she had seen in her short life, and trying to realize that she was in her beloved mother's early home.

When the cousins ushered her into her room, they found Lischen already established there, and in a state of high activity.

With great gentleness, Alice expressed her wish to be alone, and to "rest," as Lady Haughton would have said.

When she found herself free, the thoughts

that crowded her brain were full of intense pain. The loss of a mother is generally felt more as every year goes on. There is not a relation in life, there is not a step taken, in which a motherless girl does not long for the motherly love and sympathy from which she is for ever cut off!

Putting aside the immeasurable loss to a girl growing up to womanhood unrestrained, perhaps hardened, by the want of the guiding hand that alone can enter into all the corners and crevices of her character, if a girl is beloved and is won, how she longs to pour forth her hopes and fears to the mother she has never known! If she has children, how she yearns for the motherly counsel, the appreciation which no one *but* her mother can give her!

No! the premature death of a mother is one of the mysterious deeds of God; to be understood only in that day when all dark things shall be made light; and when a girl is doubly an orphan—when her father is

also taken from her—there must be at times a sense of loneliness that no one can sufficiently appreciate unless they have experienced it!

Alice, old in the lesson of self-control, roused herself from repinings that were so useless, and prepared to go down stairs.

The year that had gone by had been anything but a profitless one to her, and had been marked by one great event in addition to the death of Mrs. Herbert. Mrs. Herbert's complaint had been one of a gradual fading away—a sort of atrophy—accompanied with very little suffering. Alice had nursed her devotedly, and the constant companionship had been of use to Mrs. Herbert's rather feeble character. She was touched by the repeated refusals to leave her, when Alice was urged (as she had been more than once) to accept the more brilliant homes which were offered to her; and Alice learnt lessons by that lingering death-

bed that were of use to her all the rest of her life.

The other great event had been Mr. Germayne's death. The inextricable confusion in which his affairs were placed by the failure of one speculation after another, had prevented his returning to England, and he was too proud a man to face the world after so great a downfall. Even Sir Luke had failed to see him, or indeed, to hear from him, and all that was known of him was that he was writing for some daily paper articles trenchant in style, and especially remarkable for a spirit of intolerance, and a bitterness which gave them popularity with many embittered themselves by disappointments.

Without illness—at all events without betraying it—he was found one morning asleep, as was supposed, at his writing-table, his head resting on his arms; but the sleep was the sleep of death, and the one person who knew where his conduct had been laid

open to the charge of dishonour, sheltered his name, and allowed the remembrance of his misdeeds to die with him. He left a will in which he divided various sums of money between Alice and Sir Luke Haughton. It is almost needless to say, no such sums of money ever were recovered, and even Sir Luke acknowledged that he could hardly have believed in their existence himself.

CHAPTER XX.

THE HAUGHTON COUSINS.

The room was but dimly lighted into which Alice Herbert, having changed her dress for dinner, now found her way. She knew that Edward was delicate, but was not prepared for ill health so marked; she had not anticipated actual deformity.

His expression was one most sad to see; it was the evidence of pain without its softening effect. There was a sharpness in the tone of his voice that was too evidently the result of suppressed irritability. How Alice felt for him!

Seated in the full blaze of the well-lighted dinner-table, the cousins mutually examined each other.

The sisters were both unreasonably annoyed to find the cousin who, according to their ideas, had laboured under so many disadvantages, so perfectly all she ought to have been. After a *séjour* almost unbroken at a vulgar little place like Braxfield for nearly eighteen months, brought by her step-mother's connexions into almost daily contact with "hordes of barbarians," they were prepared to have much to forgive, and to have plenty to do in teaching her the way in which she ought to go. But the expression of Alice's bright and spirited face was very unlike that of a girl who had anything to unlearn. Alice had plenty of faults; she was too fond of judging for herself, and was impulsive in her mode of action; but nothing could destroy the natural refinement of mind—nothing could lower the standard so carefully raised by her father, truth and untruth. Nothing could narrow the width between these, and on this basis other things were erected—

each as distinct to her mind, and as far apart as though a wall of granite lay between.

On the one hand, reality, earnestness, which enhanced and gave value to all that was beautiful in thought, or noble in expression!

On the other, falsity and shallowness, everything that was distasteful, mean, and deteriorating!

To these tests Alice Herbert brought everything, and the effect upon her character may be understood. Her ignorance of the world and the world's ways was shown in her gifting other people with, at all events, the same aspirations as herself. She credited everybody with the same appreciation for things worthy to be appreciated, and did not recognise the wide difference that lay in reality between her and those who accepted a lower standard.

She was surprised at the superciliousness of manner and slighting tone common to

both her cousins towards their mother (a relation so sacred in her eyes), and it was also different from anything she had ever seen before.

Indeed the girls snubbed their mother openly, and she was only not quite to be pitied because she was not in the least aware of it.

It was evident to Alice that there was some jar at present—the family spirits were out of tune; and the reason very soon appeared.

It was a question of going to London, to which the girls had been looking forward. Sir Luke declared he had no intention of going, that he could not afford it, &c. &c. &c., and that they must make up their minds to spend a season in the country. Alice, innocently enough, told Sir Luke that she had promised to go to Lady Cecil immediately after Easter.

Sir Luke said he was very glad to hear it. He had been obliged to give up all idea of

going, and he had only regretted it upon her account from its being her first season. The girls had had so many, that it could not make much difference to them (the girls looked at each other and sighed deeply). Mildred said, in a tone that might mean anything, that she was sorry not to go, more for the sake of others than herself. There were some people, she remarked, who would be disappointed by their absence. "How very dear and kind of Aunt Cecil to have you," she continued, looking at Alice. "I know she is quite an invalid now, and I am afraid you will find it very dull."

"Aunt Cecil does not intend to shut me up entirely," said Alice; "and my godmother, the Duchess of Branlingham, is to present me, and take me out."

"Oh!" answered Mildred, amiably. "How very nice for you. I had thought you were going to be 'quiet' and nurse Aunt Cecil. I had no idea you were look-

ing forward to a regular season. I hope you will not find going out so much will upset poor Aunt Cecil. She is not very strong."

"She takes a great interest in all that goes on," answered Alice, not quite understanding Mildred's tone.

"She never takes much notice of the girls," said Lady Haughton, plaintively; "I never knew why. But I am very glad she is kind to you, my dear, and that you are going to be so gay; at the same time I think it is a pity, Sir Luke, you should say *so* decidedly that you do not intend going to London. It is a great pity to say you do not mean to do a thing, and then be obliged to do it; especially for a decided man. A thousand things may happen. I may want, or be obliged to go. I may have a dangerous illness, and we may all be obliged to go."

"I only meant, my dear," said Sir Luke, kindly, "that I did not intend going there

for pleasure, and I sincerely trust you will not bespeak a dangerous illness for the sake of proving me wrong."

"I do not intend to have any illness at all," answered Lady Haughton, quite seriously; "but I think it is very stupid saying *so* decidedly you wont go to London, when perhaps you may be obliged to go; and if you are not, it will be a great disappointment to the girls."

"Your not having a dangerous illness, or not going to London?" asked Edward, demurely.

"I mean both," said Lady Haughton. "No—what I mean is that your father makes one depend upon the other!"

"I certainly am not aware of having done so," said Sir Luke; "on the contrary, I think the illness is your suggestion entirely."

"Now, Sir Luke," said his wife, fretfully, "you are only trying to begin one of your puzzling arguments. I am sure Alice *quite* understands me!"

Alice luckily was spared the necessity of a reply by Mildred, who began a half playful, half angry attack upon her father, wishing to know why he had settled their "doom" so long beforehand.

"I am sorry you consider spending a spring in the country so very wretched," said Sir Luke.

"And I cannot understand why you two like London so much," said Edward. "The whole time you are there you are perpetually being offended by some mistake about your 'position;' and you pass a life of endless disappointment, always trying to go to some place you are not asked to; and if you do achieve an invitation, you find you know nobody, and come home abusing the place, the people, and the entertainment!"

"A very *brotherly* way of putting it," said Mary, who would like to have shaken him for saying this before Alice, "and shows how very little you know about it all."

A regular cross fire began between the three. Alice, to whom all this was new, felt uncomfortable, and was afraid of vexing them by laughing out loud. There was something so absurd in the whole scene, which was by way of being all perfectly good-humoured, and which lasted till Lady Haughton gave the signal for moving into the drawing-room.

Altogether Alice was a little disappointed in her cousins, and when she thought over the evening by herself, she came to the conclusion that if her first impressions were correct, they never could be to her what she had hoped, and then the usual feeling came over her—the bitter, bitter regret for her mother's death—the longing for sympathy and companionship. Why was the life of some so full, so surrounded by all that gave it a charm?—why was hers so desolate?

CHAPTER XXI.

SIR LUKE BECOMES CONFIDENTIAL.

Winter, with its pleasures and its drawbacks, had disappeared, and spring was again making the country beautiful.

The winter at Haughton had passed quietly enough, and Alice Herbert, though she was not very fond of either of her cousins, had found a great charm in Sir Luke's constant kindness and his appreciation of her.

She could not help acknowledging that the life the two girls had led was of necessity one that tended to lower their tone of mind.

It was the history of a great many girls. Moving about with no home duties, and

left entirely to the care of an "accomplished" governess, they had been taught everything with the one view of playing well their part in the world. Self-denial, self-discipline, habits of thought—the far larger and higher part of education—where was it? As Alice knew them better, she stood amazed at the narrowness of their views, at the way in which everything revolved round self. Even in small things, it was actual selfishness that governed them. Any appeal to what happened to affect them was responded to immediately; to every other consideration they were deaf. Alice could not help contrasting Sir Luke's conduct as a father with that of her own father; but Sir Luke, having made a very common mistake and married a very pretty woman with but one idea in her head, perpetuated it by imagining her deficiencies extended to his daughters, and he supposed they were very much like other girls—at all events, he never

imagined he could alter them in any way.

Lady Haughton had altered very little all these years. Her novel reading was no longer the absorbing pleasure it had been. She had forsaken it in a great degree, and had taken to the weakest and most diluted religious tales that make their appearance from time to time, inclining especially to those from the other side of the water, where the heroines dissolve so constantly into tears, that the general impression left on the mind after an attempt at perusal is that everything and everybody is drowned in perpetual showers of lukewarm water. These tales had a most soothing effect upon her nerves, and she found great pleasure in weeping gently also, out of sympathy, though who she sympathized with, why they cried, and why she did the same thing, she could not possibly have explained had she been brought to book.

It is quite certain that she entertained a

conviction that these books did her a great deal of good; and perhaps there may be certain enfeebled organizations to whom this reading affords satisfaction. At all events, no one can accuse it of being exciting or "sensational."

Molly Haughton was always what she had been at first. With a gentle gliding movement she put upon one side everything unpleasant or disagreeable that might possibly affect her.

How Alice longed occasionally to force her into an open antagonism! Impossible! If, in very glaring cases, her opinion was obliged to go against you, she apologized so sweetly for disagreeing with you, and had so many excellent reasons for seeing things in a different light, that she almost made you believe yourself in the wrong; and, though she never did put herself out of her way for anybody, she could always account for it so ingeniously that you quite blamed yourself

for having ever expected her to do anything else.

The fresh bright feeling that spring gives to all whose minds are in a wholesome and healthy state, was very pleasant to Alice. Her step was lighter, and her spirits higher than they had been since the loss of her father. Long walks, that brought a lovely colour to her face; searches for ferns, rare bits of moss, and early wild flowers, absolutely puzzled her cousins, who were chilly, and loved neither open windows nor the brisk air except when carefully guarded from cold, and considered Alice's love of exercise was only one form of an excitability that would tame down with time and contact with "good" society.

It was only natural that at times the remembrance of Cecil Champneys came before her, and she wondered if they would ever meet again.

Since their parting, she had certainly

seen no one who was capable of displacing him in her regard, for, though they were not "in love" with each other, she did not think of him quite in the same light as other people.

She thought often enough that it was a pity that she had overheard *that* miserable conversation between him and Herr Hofrath, and, on recollecting it, her vexation rested more upon the poor Hofrath than upon the young man who had shown such decided bad taste—which was a little unjust; but has there ever been an instance of the person who interfered at any time being treated justly? Then she was glad she had heard his candid opinion of her; and, after all, though she should like to see him again, it was only because she liked him *as a friend.*

She knew that he was related to Sir Luke, but she never liked to ask about him, and the subject of his stay at Antwerp never happened to be broached.

One day, Sir Luke met her as she was starting on one of her expeditions, and, to her surprise, he offered to be her companion.

They talked of many indifferent things for a little while, and then Sir Luke began to touch upon the subject of all others from which Alice shrank—his son.

Edward Haughton's failing health was so visible to every one *but* his mother, that he was humoured even by Mildred. Sir Luke, however, though showing, by an increase of kindness in manner and a consideration for his whims, that he, too, recognised the additional weakness, never put his thoughts into words.

Much to Alice's consternation now, Sir Luke asked her, in point blank terms, if she did not think Edward much worse than when she first arrived at Haughton?

"The winter always tries an invalid," she answered; "and this winter has been unusually severe."

"You do not like to say that you think him worse, for fear of giving me pain," said Sir Luke; "but, Alice, I must face the truth, however painful; and he told me this morning that he himself only knows how ill and how weak he is!"

Alice pressed her uncle's arm sympathizingly.

"It would be selfish in us to wish to prolong the poor boy's suffering," continued Sir Luke; "he has had a very trying life, as it is. Almost constant pain, poor fellow; and no doctor who has ever seen him gives one hope of any relief beyond something merely temporary. For a long time I hoped against hope: it seemed so hard that one's only son should be so complete an invalid; but lately I have been trying to see it all as I ought. Do you know who succeeds to Haughton, after me, if Edward is no longer living?"

"No," answered Alice, gently.

"Cecil Champneys," answered Sir Luke.

"*You* know him, Alice; and I assure you he spoke of you with the greatest, the most devoted affection—in short, he told me of his proposal, and of your having refused him. I suppose," continued Sir Luke, "that he is wanting in some of those qualities that go so far to win a young woman's love? But he is a fine young fellow, and nothing can exceed his kindness and tact in his dealings with my poor boy."

"He is very good, and was very kind," murmured Alice, tremulously; "but, Uncle Luke, in those days——You do not know —he did *not* love me—he only proposed to me because he thought it was expected," and she told Sir Luke of the way in which she had felt him shrink when her poor father had joined their hands. "He never, till after that wretched mistake," she continued, "tried to show me anything beyond the familiar friendliness of a brother; and indeed, I do not think he cared one

bit for me till he found that I was not prepared to jump down his throat on the faintest encouragement! When he found I was not inclined to take advantage of his offer, the spirit of contradiction made him anxious that I should be his wife. No! he certainly did not love me in those days!"

"He spoke very much as if he did," said Sir Luke; "but really you young ladies refine and analyse to such an extent in these days that it is difficult to keep up with you. Why should that young man have asked you to marry him if he did not care for you—eh?"

"He only did it because he thought it right—that it was expected," said Alice.

"Ah! so you say; but how do you know that?" inquired Sir Luke.

Exactly what Alice could not tell him—impossible to say that she had overheard him say as much to Herr Hofrath.

"At all events," continued Sir Luke,

"what I wanted to tell you is this, Edward thinks himself worse, and he has taken into his head that he wants Cecil Champneys to come here, and insists upon my writing pressingly to him to come *now*—at once. As I was Cecil's confidant, I thought it only fair to let you know this, in case you might have any objection to meeting him, or seeing him again;" and Sir Luke glanced mischievously at his niece's face.

"I have no objection," she managed to say; "at this distance of time we shall probably meet with equal indifference on both sides."

"I suppose so," said Sir Luke, drily. "Well, it is a comfort that you do not dislike his coming. I think I had better say so in my letter to him."

"Uncle Luke!" exclaimed Alice, indignantly.

"Because perhaps he may fancy that you dislike seeing him, and it *may* prevent his coming."

"I do hope," said Alice, with dignity, "that you will not mention my name at all. Indeed, Uncle Luke, if you knew all, you would not talk about me to him at all. We parted as cousins and friends," she continued; "do not bring me forward in any way."

Sir Luke promised as they retraced their steps to the house; and as Alice stepped beside him, she felt surprised at the joy that had suddenly come into her life. Was it that she *had* mistaken her feelings, and that in reality she loved him—this Cecil Champneys? No; it was only natural that she should remember with pleasure any one so intimately connected with her father's memory. She always liked people who had known her father, and it was quite possible to like people excessively without being in love with them; so she settled the point to her own complete satisfaction. One question she took courage to ask Sir Luke, as they came within sight of the house—Lady

Haughton and her cousins, did *they* know? . . . . No; nobody knew but Sir Luke; nobody had the least idea that they had even met except once for a short time before Alice was quite grown up.

Alice thanked her uncle with a warmth proportionate to her relief, and ran upstairs with a heart as light as her footsteps.

CHAPTER XXII.

CECIL CHAMPNEYS REAPPEARS.

When the fact of Mr. Champneys' expected arrival became known to her cousins, Alice Herbert rejoiced doubly at their entire ignorance of his ever having been more to her than a common acquaintance.

Mildred settled immediately that he would be "devoted" to her; indeed, she hinted to Alice that on one or two occasions he had displayed a good deal of admiration.

It was so new to Alice to find that any girl habitually exaggerated the importance of any one's attentions that she gave it implicit credit. Mildred certainly was not what she imagined would satisfy Mr. Champneys' fastidious ideas about his wife,

and Sir Luke had dwelt upon his remembrance of her; but against this there was Mildred's own feeling, and judging her by herself, Alice thought that could not mislead her.

She did Cecil every justice in giving him credit for being perfectly disinterested. Unless a man has been very much hardened, or is exceptionally mean in his ideas, he does not *wish* to owe anything to the woman he loves; the chivalric side of his nature inspires him far more with the desire to give her everything. He likes to think that she owes all the beauty of her life, all its comfort, to him, and to him alone; and though, of course, all men are not placed in a position that enables them to carry this out—though ways and means have to be considered often enough—as a rule, if a man has sufficient he is not in the least likely to wish his wife to have money, or to allow it to influence him in his affections.

It was not long after the conversation with Sir Luke that Alice found herself again confronting Cecil Champneys.

He had overtaken her on her way home after one of her usual walks, and, sending on the carriage, walked beside her.

She was glad to have the meeting over without witnesses; above all, to be free from the inquisitive eyes of her cousins. They would be certain to draw their own conclusions from the evident embarrassment on both sides.

Cecil Champneys, in truth, was completely taken by surprise. He had always thought Alice "handsome," but his recollection had but ill prepared him for the magnificent and beautiful girl which she had become.

There was something enchanting in the brilliant smile and changing colour, and so much gentleness in her manner that it enhanced the extreme self-possession and self-

reliance that her position had rendered natural to her. Cecil's admiration increased as he watched the easy, graceful movement of her upright figure. She walked as only those women walk who are really well-made. Too rapidly, as Cecil thought, they reached the house; and entering the drawing-room, Alice rang to send word to Lady Haughton and Sir Luke of his arrival.

Fain would he have arrested her hand, and lingered a little in the twilight—have gained courage to ask her how they stood, on what footing he might consider himself, but he found himself submitting without a word, stupefied by the remembrance of the golden opportunity he had so blindly disregarded at the time. What an idiot he had been!

Lady Cecil had amused herself by tantalizing him a little. She had described Alice as having "grown a good deal." The one question he had ventured to put had not elicited a satisfactory reply.

"Did Alice — had she ever mentioned him ? and did Lady Cecil think she remembered him ?"

"Mentioned him? Yes, Alice had mentioned him once or twice. Remember him? Lady Cecil thought she did. He was a very nice boy, full of theories, and rather too fond of dictating to others."

This was how she remembered him, and Cecil was hurt, not to say angry.

"Alice, as perhaps you know," was Lady Cecil's parting remark, "holds a very different position now to the one she held when you knew her. She was then, as far as could be known, dependent in a great degree upon the kindness of her relations. She has now three great claims to the consideration of the world—talent, beauty, and forty thousand pounds."

How these words clung to Cecil's memory, haunted him, and made him thoroughly uncomfortable! Of course she knew her own value now, and it was doubly difficult

for him to attempt to gain her affections. He watched her moving about the room, wondering if her perfect self-possession was real. Very probably that episode in their lives was almost if not quite obliterated from her memory; or if remembered, remembered only as the presumptuous act of the boy who was "so fond of theories and of dictating to other people."

As soon as Sir Luke's footstep was heard approaching Alice left the room.

When the party assembled for dinner, she found that the arrival of Cecil had produced a beneficial effect on the sisters. They were evidently in high good humour, and most amiable to every one, herself included.

Mildred sat next him at dinner, and Alice opposite. Sir Luke was graver than usual, and she wondered if the reason of his apparent and unusual sadness was really unknown to his daughters. How much she felt for him! receiving as his guest the man who was eventually to take the place his

son would have filled had ordinary health and strength been his.

The meeting with Cecil had also naturally drawn her thoughts to her father. Lady Haughton was not inclined to talk either, and therefore the dinner was silent enough. Lady Haughton wondered often how it was that neither of her daughters were married. She had married very young herself, and she thought they ought by rights to have done the same. There was a great deal poor Lady Haughton never could understand; and now, as she endeavoured to comprehend the meaning of an observation of her husband's, she got hopelessly involved in a round of thought, beginning with her own wedding dress, going on to the "independence" of young ladies of the present day, and between the question of whether they affected their dress or their dress affected them, and if hoops were or were not desirable things, her ladyship's ideas collapsed.

In a house like Haughton, Alice Herbert's good qualities were seen to great advantage. Her early acquaintance with sorrow had removed her, as it does every one, from either triviality or frivolity. No one who has stood face to face with a great grief can utterly and entirely shake off the effects of it, and those unconquerably high spirits that drive off its remembrance for a time are subject to the most agonizing and terrible reactions afterwards, when memory holds up her veil and once more we look back and live again through the desolate past. Alice had not very high spirits, but she had the blessing of an equable and even temper.

Poor Edward Haughton, who during his saddened life had never before been enabled to realize the blessing of womanly sympathy and companionship, looked upon her as a sort of ministering angel.

It was impossible for her, with her generous and affectionate nature, to see so

much suffering—a life wherein lay so little sunshine, without endeavouring to alleviate the first, and give what brightness she could.

She sat beside him constantly, and cheered him in a thousand ways; she read *with* him and *to* him, and often, when the moment of suffering rendered conversation impossible, her silent sympathy was felt, and gave him comfort. She was never too bright for him, making a painful contrast, and jarring upon feelings necessarily pitched in a lower key; and she was never so depressed as to act as a dead weight upon his spirits.

Little by little, she was beginning to understand her cousins, and was not too good not to derive great amusement from the open display of vanity that made Mildred incur her brother's sarcastic remarks. She had yet to learn that it drove her cousin into the depths of insincerity, and even falsehood. Exaggeration begun

from habit, almost without being aware of it, led to much that was absolutely false, when corroboration seemed necessary.

In spite of all that could be done, however, Edward seemed to get weaker and weaker, and even his sisters, who had grown so accustomed to his sufferings that they took them almost as a matter of course, lowered their voices, and that hushed sense of expectation, the shadow of a coming grief, fell upon Haughton Hall.

CHAPTER XXIII.

COMPLICATIONS BEGIN.

Alice Herbert had made up her mind from the moment she found herself drawn into so close an association with Mr. Champneys, that her conduct should be everything that was natural, sisterly, and unexceptionable.

He should learn now that standing by herself as she did, she desired to make no claim upon him in any one way; the scenes they had witnessed together she should not accept as a reason for being upon any other footing.

When a girl of some force of character decides on conviction what her proper course of conduct ought to be, she is generally tolerably successful in carrying it out.

Had there been any pique visible in her manner, had she taken pains to be a little disagreeable, Cecil Champneys would have had much greater hopes of making up for lost time. A quarrel is very often an excellent opening for the explanations he was dying to have, and which he found so difficult to bring about.

But it was utterly impossible to make a quarrel with Alice, when she neither snubbed him, or was in the very least degree too reserved, and the unfortunate Cecil was at last driven into the conviction that Lady Cecil had only spoken the truth, and that Alice, in spite of the brilliant colour which had so enhanced her beauty when they first met, only did remember him as the "boy" who had been anything but the pleasant companion he had imagined himself to be.

Cecil tried a little extra attention to Mildred, but was obliged to give that up, partly because Mildred was rather a dangerous subject for an experimental flirtation, and

partly because upon Alice herself it produced no effect whatever, as far as he could discover.

Lady Haughton was now entirely absorbed in her son. Conviction of his hopeless state had at length dawned upon her; and morning, noon, and night her energies were developed in his direction, always excepting the moments when she drove Sir Luke nearly crazy by her lamentations.

She was so sure that something might have been done had they only known how seriously ill he was before. It was in vain for Sir Luke to assure her that she herself was the only person who had not recognised his state long ago.

"Why," said Lady Haughton, in her habitually fretful tone, "why did you not send him up to London? Why would you not let me go to London? The doctors there——"

"The doctors there, as you must re-

member, my dear," he answered, "did see him, and recommended his coming down here."

"I have no opinion of any of them," said Lady Haughton, with a beautiful disregard of consistency. "Now, abroad there was that nice old man with the fat Norwegian ponies—I often wonder where he got them — but about poor dear Edward!—they and he especially—that nice man with the ponies: he did miracles —absolute miracles—for me. How I wish he could see Edward."

"Do you not remember his seeing him, and offending you by telling you to resign yourself; for that a spine complaint like his was incurable ?"

"Did he ?" exclaimed her ladyship. "Well, I think I remember his being dreadfully decided when there really was no occasion. It must have been some one else I liked. But, Sir Luke, now that he is *really* ill I think it so wrong not to take him to

London, now that we know all about his illness. I could explain it all to the doctors, which would make everything clear to them. Doctors never do know anything till one tells them what is the matter with one."

Day after day Lady Haughton tried her unfortunate husband's patience in this way.

Alice looked on and admired, and she tried to help by engaging Lady Haughton's attention and getting her to talk to her. Very fruitlessly her aunt imagined that her presence was the greatest comfort to her son, and that it was her duty to be in his room, or with her husband.

"It is all very well for you, dear Alice," she would say almost invariably, "but you have no son, and if you had he could not possibly be grown up, so how can you judge what I feel?"

Cecil, in the meantime, remembered that nothing yet was done with reference to the

business which had called him to Haughton, but he was far too thankful to continue near Alice to take any steps to bring Sir Luke to a recollection of it.

A very unexpected event in the meantime turned all their thoughts in another direction.

Alice was aware that among the few neighbours who came "to inquire," there was one, a rather grave, rather elderly man, whose gravity was attributed to a youth passed in strict devotion to business by some people; and by others to the universal explanation for undue gravity—a disappointment—in other words, a hopeless attachment.

Mr. Harvey Saunderson was a man who had succeeded, rather late in life, to the very fine property which brought him into contact with the Haughtons. Too late for the fulfilment of dreams which had cheered the first few years of his business life, and had turned the musty books, and their

mustier smell, into golden volumes with an aroma that savoured of Paradise.

For once common report was correct, and he had loved and been beloved.

Years of waiting, patient because hopeful, had been succeeded by one of those crushing sorrows where some men leave all the best part of their existence, and where others rise from the ashes of all they cared for, altered for all time.

Mr. Saunderson had continued to work, for work was better than idleness, and the force of habit made itself felt. Anything was better than sitting down face to face with a grief like his.

His sorrow was different from most sorrows, for it was not caused by death. There was no room for the usual platitudes about the duties of resignation, the uncertainty of life, and all the varied forms of condolence to which the mourner is subjected, and which is often one of the hardest parts of a sharp trial.

No ! his love had simply grown weary of waiting for an end that never seemed to come, and, after puzzling her betrothed by one or two very wild and flighty letters, she wrote (the day before her marriage to a rich brewer) to tell him she was convinced she was promoting his happiness as well as her own, by putting an end for ever to their engagement.

Mr. Saunderson crushed her letter in his hand, and went on with what he was doing; he reached home and for days saw no one. The few friends he had supposed him ill, and felt, when he reappeared among them, that they had not been aware how severe his illness had been. But he put aside all their efforts to sympathize with him. No one, he felt, could enter into his sorrow; the one thing which had been the centre of all his hopes, the mainspring of all his actions, was gone from him, and after years of looking forward, the light had suddenly vanished.

In many men this great disappointment would have turned kindliness into bitterness, in most men any shock of the kind destroys their belief in any possible goodness. It made Mr. Saunderson a sceptic as far as the constancy of womanly love was concerned. How could he believe what his whole experience had taught him to disbelieve ?

He did not ask himself how much of the perfection he had attributed to his faithless love really existed. He only thought as she had failed so might all others fail !

Up to the last few days had she not lavished epithets of endearment upon him in the daily letters by which she endeavoured to cheat the hours of absence, and then wrecked his whole happiness for life ?

As years went on the blow softened a little; the smarting pain of the first months, almost years, had been dulled by the merciful assistance of time. And though

he never could again be what he was, he gradually began to enjoy his life again, and it was just when his heart was opening to receive fresh impressions and acknowledge kindness that he first saw Alice Herbert.

CHAPTER XXIV.

COMPLICATIONS INCREASE.

The daily visits of Mr. Harvey Saunderson, although he seldom did more than "inquire," were noted with different emotions by two of the party at Haughton.

Mary, in her own quiet way, had taken a great fancy to the man, whose history was a sealed book to her, but whose whole demeanour was rendered interesting by the many rumours floating round him.

No amount of affection would ever have induced her to give up a position of positive comfort for one unknown and doubtful. She had neither the depth of feeling which might have induced her to try it, or any capability for making the best of it; but, on

the other hand, she never would make an interested marriage. She was far too selfish ever to do anything that did not please her. As far as Mr. Saunderson's position went, there was nothing she disliked about him, either in person, fortune, or any other of the thousand and one influences that weighed with her. When they met she thought he generally seemed to protest quietly and silently against Mildred's usual manner of appropriating him, and in so far it was true that he really was a little alarmed by the excessively cordial way in which Mildred manifested her interest in him, and the pointed manner in which she tried to draw him out. Mildred was to his very quiet and rather sensitive mind a terrible young lady, whom it behoved him to be on his guard against, and yet with whom it was very desirable to keep friends.

This idea acted so as to drive him to take refuge with Mary on those occasions when he did more than make his usual

inquiry. There was so much quietness of manner that it was much less tiring to talk to her of common and ordinary things than to keep up with Mildred's excessively eager way of discussing every subject under the sun at express speed.

Poetry and politics, the last new novel, or a recent mechanical invention, an oratorio which was or was not a failure, a grand and comprehensive scheme which was to benefit everybody at nobody's expense. She turned her brains inside out at a moment's notice for his particular benefit, till the unfortunate object of such an array of talent was almost obliged to protest aloud against the whirlwind of ideas which bereft him of every sense save the overpowering one of fatigue!

Poor Mildred! making the common mistake of imagining that to please a clever or a thoughtful man you must get upon stilts and talk up to his level, whereas the greatest relief to him is to allow him to come down to yours and talk agreeable nonsense.

And after all, how trifling must the prattle of the cleverest woman appear to a really intellectual man. She probably has gleaned, in a womanly way, by a short amount of labour, a superficial and only half understood amalgamation of facts which he has devoted the best years of his life to master. But though Mr. Saunderson appreciated the repose of Mary's manner, and shielded himself from Mildred's overpowering volubility by holding her in close conversation—the object of his visits to Haughton was really Alice Herbert.

It was astonishing to the man who had gone through such a tempest of feeling to recognise in himself the power of such an affection as he was beginning to entertain for her. Was it possible that, after all that had come and gone, he found himself with a beating heart, constraining himself to answer her calm and kindly greeting in a befitting manner?

From the first, however, there was always

the feeling that she never could return his affection. He knew so little of women, his one experience was such a blighting remembrance to him, that he mistrusted his own capabilities, and believed himself devoid of anything that could really win or retain affection. And then his age: whereas in reality the most devoted attachment oftenest exists where a certain seniority gives a little tinge of reverence or respect as a background, and calls forth the highest and noblest part of an already existing affection.

Cecil Champneys was far too devoted a lover himself not to recognise symptoms of the same disease in anybody else, and if any one thing had been wanting to reduce that unhappy young man to despair it was this, aggravated by the consciousness of a certain seriousness in Alice's character which was very likely to lead her to an undue appreciation of Mr. Harvey Saunderson.

Poor Cecil! he was "helplessly, hope-

lessly, and irretrievably in love," and was now horribly jealous into the bargain.

Mildred, feeling herself quite equal to the occasion, conceived it her especial province to be "kind" to Mr. Champneys. Every one had a special occupation, as far as she could see, except herself, and so she must do her best and walk in the path left to her.

Her mother and Sir Luke were always with Edward or each other, Alice was constantly beside them all three, and Molly had the pleasant task of comforting Mr. Saunderson when he was present, and thinking of him when he was absent, for Mildred had at length come to the conclusion that he did not testify that appreciation of her that might be expected.

Out of spirits and dejected, Cecil was just in the mood to find it disagreeable to be talked to without even incurring any fatigue, and was far too much occupied with his own sense of his trials to give

much heed to the sentimental platitudes which was Mildred's way of fulfilling the duty she had recognised.

She often joined him out walking, and tested his powers of endurance in a way she had no conception of; nothing could have been more distasteful to Cecil than the way in which she constantly claimed his enthusiasm, and dragged him into reluctant compliments. And the mischief did not end here: everything he said was so carefully enlarged upon to Alice, that she was obliged to acknowledge to herself that she had been thoroughly mistaken in Mr. Champneys; neither his intellect nor his nature were what she had imagined.

She forgot that the walks gave these two one point in common, and a mutual subject for conversation, and with a proud and wretched feeling felt humiliated in her own eyes for caring at all about it.

One day she was a little startled by perceiving amongst her letters one signed

"Charles Harvey Saunderson," and expecting either an appeal to her benevolence for some charity, &c., or something commonplace, was bewildered to find herself addressed in terms of passionate entreaty. This man, Mary's lover, as she had imagined, had taken into his head to like *her*. She could not understand it; till that moment she could with perfect truth have asserted that she was the last of the three young ladies on whom he had bestowed any attention at all. The world was all going wrong, at least her world was, and poor Alice (as usual) when in any difficulty recurred to the loss of her mother—the absence of any one to whom she could turn for counsel or comfort.

Mr. Saunderson's letter touched her deeply, and appealed to all that was most generous in her nature. In it she read his painful past experience, and felt grieved that she had nothing to give to this clever, noble, kind-hearted man, except regrets.

"If only he had fallen in love with Mary," she thought; "it is so very unfortunate."

She wrote half-a-dozen answers, hating them all, and finally resolved to speak to him, anything written looked so terribly real. But how to see him without making his story known. Her dilemma was solved by Sir Luke, who was looking for her.

He was evidently out of sorts altogether. "Mr. Saunderson has written to me, Alice," he began, "and I see you know why, and that the letter he tells me of has already reached you. What do you intend doing about it?"

"I think I had better see him," said poor Alice, to whom this was a new and terrible experience; "if only I could prepare him."

"Prepare him for what?" said Sir Luke.

"I do not love him," Alice said, in a low voice.

"I never thought you did," said her uncle, gravely; "and this makes the whole affair so inexplicable to me." After a

moment's pause, he went on, "I would rather have had anything happen than this. Saunderson is the last man in the world to have written as he has done without encouragement, and this encouragement he says he has received."

"Mr. Saunderson says he has received encouragement!" exclaimed Alice, in amazement.

"Distinctly," answered her uncle; and he read the sentence to his niece. "Up till yesterday evening," wrote poor Mr. Saunderson, "I confess that I always considered my attachment to be perfectly hopeless; but I learnt yesterday that this was not quite the case, and the encouragement I received has caused me to try my fate now;" and Sir Luke, who was horribly puzzled, shut up the letter with almost a groan. He was so anxious that Alice should marry Cecil Champneys, and so sorry for Mr. Saunderson. The conduct imputed to Alice was so different from what it ought to have been,

and what Sir Luke expected of her, that he felt quite bewildered. After all, these high-spirited girls were not above behaving very badly.

"I never gave him any encouragement," said Alice, while her eyes flashed with indignation.

"He says so," was all Sir Luke's answer; "but you had better see him. If you go to the library, I will see you are not interrupted."

"Will you give him this when he comes?" asked Alice, as she hastily wrote two lines on a slip of paper, and gave it to Sir Luke.

Sir Luke took it and read—"I am *very* sorry, and do not quite understand, but I will come and speak to you." "Humph!" he said, "I am to give him this to break it to him, I suppose. I do not half like the business, I can tell you, however——" and here he retreated, leaving Alice to wonder over the intense difficulty of arriving at a

proper understanding of the masculine character between Mr. Cecil Champneys, who was always giving her to understand that she was in his eyes as something "too good for human nature's daily food," and then amused himself by paying Mildred vapid and foolish compliments, and Mr. Saunderson, a man of recognised ability, whose conduct had been almost reserved, who had never shown her anything but ordinary attentions, who had never even placed encouragement in her power, and now turned round and accused her of having given it to him. Alice for the moment hated everything and everybody, disliking her two lovers and herself more than all; and with a feeling of humility towards herself, and indignation towards Mr. Harvey Saunderson, answered the summons to the library, once again to confront an unsuccessful wooer.

CHAPTER XXV.

COMPLICATIONS CONTINUE.

The morning that found Alice Herbert preparing to go into the library, sustained by a sense of indignation at having been so ill understood by Mr. Harvey Saunderson, found Mildred in a state of restlessness that proclaimed her ill at ease.

The look of composed self-appreciation which generally pervaded her countenance, had given place to one of doubt and dissatisfaction. Mildred was evidently discomposed.

Cecil Champneys, who had gone to pay a visit to the stables, as he usually did, with Sir Luke (but who had been sent alone on this occasion), was still out. Mary had a

headache, and had not yet appeared. Lady Haughton was still upstairs, having, as was her custom, breakfasted in her own room, and Mildred's curiosity was at fever point.

Quick to observe, she had noticed her father's disturbed manner when the letter had reached him ; she had seen him go to her cousin's room, and, as if further proof had been needed to inform her intelligence that something unusual had occurred, Sir Luke told her that if she wanted to draw she must betake herself elsewhere that morning, for that some one was coming to see him on business in the library.

Mildred had reasons of her own for knowing that that person was probably Mr. Harvey Saunderson. Her expression was exactly at times that of a child who having set something on fire sees the flame he has originated blaze up beyond his control ; she had a look of half-frightened mischief.

Cecil Champneys was the first person to

arrive in the drawing-room and break in upon her solitude. He was evidently put out about something, not to say cross.

"What in the world," he began, "brings that old fellow here at this time of day? He is really getting almost to imagine this his home; morning, noon, and night—he is always calling now."

"There are so many old fellows," said Mildred; "would you mind specifying the individual in question a little more particularly?"

"Mr. Saunderson; you know quite well who I mean, Mildred," he answered.

"Mr. Saunderson!" she exclaimed, "only Mr. Saunderson;" and then went on in a most matter-of-fact manner: "He looks upon my father as a sort of mine of information upon every subject connected with—well—cabbages and carrots, and agriculture of all kinds; probably wants some especial advice as to the hoeing of his turnips, or, having cut his corn, where on earth he is to put it."

Cecil was a great deal too grumpy to be drawn out in this way, and said nothing.

"It must be very puzzling," said Mildred, in the same tone, "for a man who does not know one grain of corn from another to be suddenly called upon to enter into the whole question on such a scale. His model farm must be a dreadful trial to him, and he makes such absurd mistakes. His steward told him the other day that he had been offered so many shillings for his red beard, and Mr. Saunderson for a moment or two entirely forgot it must refer to wheat, and very nearly went into a passion."

Cecil could not help a short laugh, which encouraged Mildred immensely.

"Papa has been a little mysterious this morning," she said, "and I *think* I know all about it."

"You generally do know all about everything, Mildred," Cecil could not help saying; "only sometimes you make mistakes."

Mildred was provoked. "I have every right to know all about this, as it happens, if I chose to speak."

Cecil made no answer, and took up a book.

Mildred was excessively irritated. Nothing annoyed her more than the way in which Cecil never seemed to pay much attention to what she said, and she tried so very hard to get on with him. The truth was, that her incessant little speeches about Alice worried him beyond measure. She was always repeating something to him, in which she always represented herself taking his part against some trifling but slighting remarks made by Alice; and if even such things have no permanent ill effect, they generally do not render the teller beloved.

"You call Mr. Saunderson old," said Mildred; "I would advise you not to call him old before my cousin Alice."

"Might I know why ?" inquired Cecil,

angry with himself for caring so much to know.

"A great deal I suspect has gone on this morning," said Mildred; "a certain air of mystery pervading my excellent father—interview with my beloved cousin—library rendered sacred by parental decree—arrival at an early hour of an individual swell, age uncertain, and generally infelicitous as to his waistcoats—Miss Herbert descending the stairs with even more than her usual dignity. All these things, to my mind, joined to a perfect explosion of thanks I received last night, seem to me——"

"I wish to heaven you would speak sense," said Cecil, thoroughly angry by this time.

"I am speaking the greatest possible amount of sense," said Mildred, "and even excellent grammar, only you are so horribly cross that really everything is wasted upon you."

"What do you mean about Mr. Saunder-

son's visit ?" inquired Cecil, rising and standing in front of her.

"I think," she said, demurely, "that that excellent man has worked himself up to a proper pitch of enthusiasm, and that he has come to propose."

"To whom ?" said Cecil, while his very fingers tingled with the effort at self-control.

"Perhaps for Mary—who knows ?" said Mildred, carelessly; "perhaps for me. Though *you* do not happen to be in love with me, Cecil, some people evince a certain appreciation."

Cecil was guilty of wishing he could shake her! "You do not choose to give me a direct answer," he said; "but after all you have insinuated you must be aware that I have a right to insist upon your speaking out. Why do you connect Mr. Saunderson with Alice, and Sir Luke's visit to your cousin's room, together ? and what do you refer to when you speak of being thanked?

"I only meant," said Mildred, rejoicing in having roused him at last, "that I happened to meet Mr. Saunderson yesterday afternoon, and he walked a little way home with me, and we talked a little about Alice."

"Well?" said Cecil, with rather a contemptuous ring in his voice.

"I said, with reference to a remark about you, that Alice always appreciated men a little older than herself; and——"

Mildred coloured and hesitated.

Cecil still stood expectant.

"I—I really forget now," said Mildred, who began to think she would have done better had she not intermeddled and brought things to an issue. "I know he quite surprised me by thanking me so very gratefully—I did not——" She was going to have said, "I did not know why," but even her untruthful spirit quailed a little before Cecil's indignant face, and she stopped short.

"I *think* I understand," he said; "your only excuse is, that being thoroughly heartless yourself, you cannot measure the pain you give ——," and not trusting himself to speak again to her, he left the room.

Mildred was in a desperate fright. "What a bore these men are," she said, "with their deep affections and ebullitions. Cecil looked very much inclined to demolish me on the spot. I wonder if I looked foolish!" and Mildred deliberately rose, walked to the looking-glass, and surveyed her fair face, endeavouring to assume the expression she fancied had been hers during the interview.

The truth was that she had met Mr. Saunderson, and first began by disparaging Alice a little to him, insinuating various things, and not knowing in the least whom she had to deal with.

Mr. Harvey Saunderson was the last man in the world to whom it was safe to in-

sinuate anything. He brought Mildred to book immediately, when, finding it very difficult to back out of her assertions, she had been drawn into repeating, with her usual exaggerations, certain remarks she had drawn from Alice, and which, though she skilfully avoided applying them directly to Mr. Saunderson, could not but lead him to believe himself an object of interest to her. Mildred did not mean to be taken literally; she was astonished by the warm and grateful thanks she received, and felt for the moment how dangerous it was to trifle with a man so uncompromising in his regard for truth that he never dreamed of the possibility of her misleading him. But Mildred's conscience was elastic, and after a little worry she put aside all remembrance of what she had done, save and except how far her share in the whole matter was likely to be brought to light.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ANOTHER REJECTED ADDRESS.

Sir Luke Haughton awaited the arrival of Mr. Saunderson with a feeling of unmixed sorrow for his impending disappointment. He was thoroughly annoyed that the favourite niece in whom he had recognised so much superiority, should have acted so ill towards a man whose character and age ought to have placed him beyond the reach of a girl's vanity.

It was cruel, he thought, to have treated Mr. Saunderson in this way; and he could not understand why in this instance Alice should have departed from her usual mode of acting.

If there was one thing beyond another

that endeared Alice to her uncle, it was the downright honesty of her character, shrinking not only from what was false in itself, but from everything that was doubtful. Even the amusing and comparatively harmless exaggerations of things that had occurred, Alice never indulged in, for which her uncle deservedly gave her infinite credit, the more so because she inherited her mother's vivid imagination and intense sense of the ridiculous which so often leads to colouring what is colourless in itself.

When Mr. Saunderson arrived, the expression of Sir Luke's face told him immediately that the hopes that had risen to so high a pitch the night before were in this, as in other instances, but the result of a flattering tale "*too* flatteringly told."

The pang was keen, and he sat down to endeavour to speak with composure. Sir Luke gave him the little note Alice had written. "I cannot tell you how grieved I am about it all," he said, in a tone of

heartfelt sympathy; "I cannot understand it."

"I have been very foolish, I am afraid," said Mr. Saunderson; "and now I am afraid the pleasant terms we stood upon will be altered—it is——I am very unfortunate! Do not let her come," he continued; "it is very kind, very like her, but it will be a needless trial to both of us."

"Alice does not deserve so much consideration," said Sir Luke; "she must have behaved very ill—I cannot understand her!"

"Indeed she has not behaved ill," eagerly interposed Mr. Saunderson. "No! had I only accepted her manner as the guide to her real feelings, as I ought to have done, I never would have placed myself in so false a position!"

"Then what the deuce do you mean when you speak of encouragement?" asked Sir Luke, completely mystified.

"I was told—I was led to believe that——"

and here he came to a full stop; he was too generous to betray Mildred, and gave her credit for not having wilfully deceived him. "I cannot explain it all," he continued; "you must only believe that Alice, Miss Herbert, has done nothing at variance with her usual habits; she has been consistent throughout, only," he said, lowering his voice a little, and speaking in a tone of broken-hearted misery, "it has revived old thoughts, old associations; the bright vision came only to make me feel how dreary and how dark my night is. A perpetual sense of desolation, and the miserable remembrance of deception!" He was silent for a few moments. "I blame myself most in all this," he said, turning to Sir Luke a face calm, though pale. "Tell Alice not to be sorry for me, and do ask her to try and let it be as it was. I shall go away for a little while, and when I return I do trust my wretched mistake may be forgotten."

Sir Luke said all he could think of to

comfort him, and saw him depart with a very strong wish to find out what had led to this mistake, and a great sense of relief that Alice was held blameless.

Then his thoughts recurred to other things. "What a curious thing it is," he reflected, "from what very opposite causes trials come. All the worries of my life have arisen from the fact of my having a wife, and there is as great a man as ever lived worrying himself to death because he hasn't got one;" and Sir Luke turned from the window, and ringing the bell, desired Miss Herbert to be told she was wanted in the library.

With a little more than her usual stateliness, with a face more pale than was its wont to be, Alice descended the stairs, to bring Mr. Harvey Saunderson to a sense of her displeasure, and of how little he had comprehended her. All his talents, all her admiration for his character, were as nothing when weighed against the pre-

sumption which had accused her of encouragement.

With a self-possession that was assisted by this strong feeling of indignation, and with a dignity almost regal, she opened the library door and looked round. Sir Luke alone was there, immensely amused at the way in which so much dignity was wasted. He went towards her, and his hearty kiss reassured her, and told her she was reinstated in his good opinion.

It was with a gasp of relief that she sat down and asked if Mr. Saunderson had been there, and had he explained.

"Mr. Saunderson has been here, and holds you blameless," said Sir Luke; at which Alice drew up her head and turned upon her uncle. "More generous than you," she said; "you doubted me."

"I could not understand it, my dear. Indeed, now I do not understand you all. Mr. Saunderson was told, was led to believe that you cared for him; he must have mis-

understood something or somebody. But though I am heartily sorry for him, I am so glad to find——" He stopped, for Alice was looking at him, and under the influence of her indignant face silence was best.

Alice was thoroughly hurt and immensely disgusted. She knew that she hated, with an intense hatred, the idea of leading a man on to a prepared humiliation, and she thought Sir Luke ought to have known her better. The conversation was not tending to much that was pleasant, and both felt what a relief it was when Mildred came into the room wih great animation, and put a telegram into Sir Luke's hands.

"I am dying to know what is in it," she exclaimed, quite candidly, and as she spoke she looked all round the room expecting to see Mr. Harvey Saunderson.

Sir Luke was much upset. "Poor thing!" he said; "Alice, your poor Aunt Cecil has had a stroke, and is extremely anxious that you should go to her without

loss of time. How soon could you be ready?"

"Immediately," said Alice; "I can be ready very soon."

"You can catch the express-train, even if you wait for luncheon," said Sir Luke; "and you had better do that."

Alice was anxious to hurry off at once, but she yielded the point. She rather dreaded meeting Cecil Champneys, and worried herself a little about his knowing or not knowing all that had occurred that morning. That Mildred knew, or guessed, she saw immediately by the look that she had cast round the room; and a suspicion flashed across her mind. Was it possible that Mildred had been the means of misleading Mr. Saunderson? She could not help feeling it was probable. Alice was conscious of having frequently smarted under Mildred's tongue, and the infliction of those little speeches which Mildred thought so calculated to bring Alice

"down" a little; but she had not much time for speculation. Lischen was far too efficient a maid not to have everything ready in less time than even Alice imagined; and when luncheon came she had nothing to do but to go down and despatch some with as good an appetite as might be. Cecil was not there; he was out; and Alice, who had been earnestly wishing for this very thing, was unreasonably disappointed. She was quite certain that Mildred would not befriend her during her absence; she was quite clever enough to see how consistently that amiable young lady represented him as being often "a little surprised" at things which were not in the least calculated to surprise anybody; besides, "surprise" meant anything in Mildred's phraseology.

The line taken by Mildred now was crediting Alice with a degree of grief for Lady Cecil's state that ought by rights to deprive her of appetite and everything else. She overacted it, however, and was

discomfited by her father, who said, "Really, Mildred, Alice, though not wanting in good feeling or affection, cannot be supposed to be quite overwhelmed by your poor aunt's illness. What are you going on in this ridiculous way for?"

Thus silenced, Mildred was obliged to give in; and luncheon over, and Lady Haughton's farewell uttered, Alice was off, and was soon whirling away towards London, thinking of the number of events that had distinguished that day from all other days.

It was not till late in the afternoon that Cecil Champneys returned home, remarkably wet as to his feet, and hungry as to his appetite; he had missed luncheon, and thereby not improved his temper; had been looking for snipe in a marsh where no snipe had appeared, and so effectually snubbed his servant that that very important personage had not had the courage to communicate the fact of Miss Herbert's

departure, or the telegram that had caused it.

When he went down to dinner Cecil was only just in time, and Sir Luke said directly, "Have you heard of Lady Cecil's illness?"

"No. Is she seriously ill?"

"Very ill, I am afraid; she had a stroke, and telegraphed to me to-day, wishing Alice to go to her as soon as possible."

Mildred watched his face: it got perfectly colourless.

"Alice has gone?" he said, speaking a little hoarsely.

"She went directly after luncheon," answered Mildred; "I asked her if she had any message to leave for anybody, and she said, 'None.'"

"What in the world are you talking about, Mildred?" said her father, angrily. "Why should Alice leave a message for anybody when she will return in two or three days probably?"

Mildred was a little afraid of her father, and contented herself with an expressive shrug of her shoulders and a look at Mary.

"Alice told me to ask you to be sure and not forget some feathers she wanted for her hat," said Sir Luke; "so you see she trusted me with a message for you. She said you would quite understand."

Cecil expressed his appreciation at having been remembered at such a moment, and Mildred had the satisfaction of seeing that his spirits raised considerably. What a nightmare those feathers became to her! she was bent upon discovering the real purport of a message so simple in sound that she could not conceive it had no double meaning.

Bent on mischief, she fired her last shot, and looking at Cecil, she said, "Did you see Mr. Harvey Saunderson to-day?"

"How do you know he was here?" asked her father, sharply.

"My dearest papa," she answered, with an expression of innocent surprise, "there cannot be two such hats as Mr. Harvey Saunderson's."

Sir Luke could not quite make out if she had or had not seen the hat on this occasion.

"Besides," continued Mildred, with great composure, "I fancied Alice was talking to him in the library."

Cecil listened eagerly for the answer.

"You were wrong, Mildred," answered her father. "Alice did not happen to come to the library till after Saunderson's departure."

Cecil could not help it, there was a little look of triumph at Mildred, who coloured, and returned it almost defiantly; but she nevertheless felt that for the moment she was foiled, and was glad to escape into the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XXVII.

EXPLANATIONS.

Cecil took this opportunity not only of arranging about the business he was now anxious to complete, but of saying that he wanted to leave Haughton, where he felt he was of no great use.

Sir Luke was kind and cordial as usual, but he also thought it a pity that he should be kept wasting his time there. He was excessively disappointed that nothing had come of the companionship into which the easy habits of the house had thrown Alice and Cecil, but he had too great a regard for both to interfere.

Cecil, however, felt that it was due to Sir Luke to open his heart to him after what

had passed on a former occasion; and the ice once broken, they became extremely confidential. To Sir Luke, Cecil told all his fears, and his reasons for believing himself an object of indifference, if not of dislike to her, and mentioned perpetual little remarks of a slighting nature, so trivial that they would hardly have been noticed by any but a lover. Sir Luke was relieved to find that on one side at least the attachment he so wished to promote was as great, if not greater than ever. He was convinced that Alice did like Cecil immensely, and hoped, if once that strange tinge of reserve was swept away, all would go right.

He began to have very uncomfortable suspicions about Mildred. Was it possible that she was so wicked as to sow doubts and dissensions between these two for her own purposes?

The look he had seen pass had first made him suspect that there was something

in the unfortunate advance of Mr. Saunderson which was known to Mildred. Could it be her that had misled him so much, his own daughter who had acted so unfairly, so ungenerously?

One thing he thought was due to poor Cecil, in whom he had every confidence; he would tell him the history of the morning, and felt *he* would keep his friend's secret, and that knowing this, he would be in a better position to judge how far an explanation with Alice at present would be likely to be successful.

"Mildred was quite right in saying Mr. Saunderson was here to-day," he said. "He came to see me this morning."

His tone made Cecil look up.

"The long and short of it is, my dear Cecil, that if you think Alice cared for Mr. Saunderson you are very much mistaken. I tell you because I know you will make no ungenerous use of it; but Saunderson, acting upon some strange misconception,

wrote to Alice, and after avowing an attachment which was flattering to any girl, from one like himself, capable of such a depth of affection, he did ask her to listen to him favourably—in short, he proposed to her."

"And Alice refused him?" exclaimed Cecil, with sparkling eyes, and trying not to look too triumphant.

"Alice would not give him that pain," said Sir Luke, gravely; "but she managed, in some of those feminine expressions which are so very comprehensive, to imply a regret without allowing anything more to be said to her. I was the person who was sent down by Miss Alice to smooth matters; and I can tell you I never hated any position more."

"He really brought it on himself," said Cecil. "Fancy Alice caring for an elderly man like that; and I am certain she never gave him reason to believe she liked him."

"So Saunderson said," added Sir Luke, a little sore at Cecil's views of Mr. Saunderson's age (Sir Luke being fifteen years his senior).

"Then why on earth did he put himself in such a false position?" said Cecil; "and of all people in the world, with Alice."

"The whole thing puzzled me not a little," continued Sir Luke. "I almost wonder Alice could reject such a man; he is always busy, and she hates an idle man (Cecil winced), and she quite appreciates his talents and all that. But the truth is," he added, "that the longer I live in the world, and the more I see of women, the more difficult it is to understand them. I have come to the conclusion that they are utterly beyond the comprehension of any man, and I sometimes think (though for my sake don't repeat it) we should be very much happier without them."

Cecil was quite in sufficient spirits to be amused, and generously forgave the slight

towards a sex at present in tremendous favour with him for the sake of Alice.

When they left the dining-room he went upstairs to see Lady Haughton, who generally sat in her sitting-room to be near Edward, whose rooms joined hers.

Cecil found her, if possible, more confused in intellect than usual, and in a state of helpless bewilderment.

All the events of the day, except as far as related to Mr. Saunderson, had been, of course, told her ; and she was occupied in vainly endeavouring to understand them.

She greeted Cecil most warmly. She had already exhausted Sir Luke's patience, and a fresh victim was quite delightful.

"Are you sure you are quite comfortable ?" she asked, after directing his attention hospitably to the respective merits of her arm-chairs.

"Quite, thanks," he answered, being at that happy age when the angle of the back

of his chair was a matter of comparative indifference to him.

Lady Haughton sank back on her cushions, and gave that gentle sigh which in her denoted perfect contentment; indeed, her sighs were very expressive, and a good guide to the various sentiments which governed her alternately. She had the gentle sigh just spoken of, and which, as I have just said, denoted contentment; she had an impatient sigh—and she had a sigh which spoke of a consciousness of severe ill-usage, which she brought into play when Sir Luke was less patient with her than usual.

Cecil had plenty to think about; and as he sat there, stretching out his legs before the fire, he was in a state of sublime indifference towards everything and everybody, always saving the one "beloved one."

Lady Haughton gave several sighs before she began to put her ideas into words, and

then her first remark was not exactly a very profound one.

"What a day this has been!" she said, plaintively. "Somehow or other, some days are different from other days."

"Quite different," said Cecil, absently, who was at that moment thinking over the presumption of Mr. Harvey Saunderson.

"Some days are quiet, and some days are so—so bustling," continued Lady Haughton. "I am so glad you agree with me, Cecil. Now, to-day—what with Sir Luke getting a telegraphic message, and Alice being ill—no; I mean Lady Cecil—and Alice going to London all in that hurry—it has been very trying;" and Lady Haughton sighed—this time impatiently.

"Did Alice come? Did she say 'good-bye' to you?" asked Cecil.

"Of course she did," said Lady Haughton. "She reads to Edward; and of course she came to say she couldn't to-day. That

is another inconvenience. He likes her reading so much better than ours; and she sat down there, just where you are sitting, and she put her face between her hands and cried for ever such a time."

"Alice cried!" exclaimed Cecil. "What made her cry?"

"Exactly my words," said Lady Haughton. "I said to her, 'Alice, what are you crying about?'"

"And what did she say?" asked Cecil, who was up by this time, and standing very near Lady Haughton.

"Nothing," answered Lady Haughton.

"Do you mean," she said, "she was crying for nothing, or that she made no reply at all?" inquired Cecil, who was beginning to get very impatient.

"I mean just what I say!" she answered. "I said, 'Alice, what are you crying for?' and she said, 'Nothing,' and went on crying. I cannot help thinking," added

Lady Haughton, impressively, "that she was sorry to go."

"Humph!" said Cecil, doubtfully.

"It was either that or her German lover," said Lady Haughton. "I always think *that* has something to do with things."

"Her German lover!" exclaimed Cecil, hardly believing he heard aright. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Please don't get so excited, Cecil," said Lady Haughton, fretfully; "if Alice had a dozen German lovers, what would it signify? There is no reason why you should speak so very loud;" and Lady Haughton put her hands up to her head, and this time sighed despairingly.

"I beg your pardon," said Cecil, trying to compose himself, "but I was so surprised."

"I really cannot see why you should be," said Lady Haughton, who could not for-

give the disturbance to which her nerves had been subjected.

"I cannot imagine Alice caring for a foreigner," said Cecil, who could not reconcile himself to such an idea, though convinced of its being a mistake.

"I never said he was a foreigner," said Lady Haughton, pettishly.

"My dear Lady Haughton!"

"I never did," reiterated Lady Haughton; "you are exactly like Sir Luke, you accuse me of saying things I really never said, or, at all events, did not mean, which comes to exactly the same thing. When Alice was abroad there was some man always in the house when her father was ill, and I am quite convinced Alice liked him in some way, but I never heard he was a German. I do believe he was English, now I think of it; never having seen him it is only natural I should not know."

Cecil bent down his head—a quick throb of hope and happiness prevented his speak-

ing; then he said, "And did Alice—has she ever spoken of this man?"

"Never," said Lady Haughton. "No, she never spoke of him; but I said to her to-day, after I asked her why she was crying, if she had ever heard of the man who was so kind to her father when he was ill abroad. I put it in that way," explained Lady Haughton.

"Yes," said Cecil, afraid of the faintest interruption.

"Well, she made no answer at all, which looked very odd; and I thought, with her money and prospects, and all that, I would put her on her guard, so I said I trusted she had not given her affections to a foreign adventurer, and then she gave a sort of laugh, and said, 'He is no adventurer;' so you see there must be some one, there is a he in the case, or she could not have said he was not an adventurer."

"Of course not," assented Cecil.

"Then," continued her ladyship, "I was

very anxious to see what she thought about him now, so I asked her point blank; I said, 'My dear, is he still in love with you?' and she said, 'Oh no, never,' and came to a dead stop. So I waited and said, 'Are you in love with him?' and Alice did what I have told you; she put her head down on her two hands and cried like——I never saw any one cry quite like it, except in a tragedy!"

"Then," said Cecil, who could hardly control himself, "what next?"

"Well, she dried her eyes, and pulled down her veil, and said good-bye all in one moment, and it is so inconvenient and——" Here Lady Haughton stopped; she was going to say ill-arranged, but checked herself, having a dim idea that Providence had something to do with it. When she aroused herself from all this exertion of thought, she looked for Cecil and he was gone. "And I had so many things to say to him," thought poor Lady Haughton. "What a different world it is now to what it was!—the idea of

Sir Luke saying I had hurt Alice's feelings, and that I had no business to say it. Feelings! no one ever talked of them when I was girl; I know I never had any feelings, and if I had had they never would have been attended to!" And poor Lady Haughton sank into her usual little nap, and was lost to the sense of that changed world which was quite too much for her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FINESSING.

When Sir Luke Haughton joined his daughters in the drawing-room, Mary, with red eyes and a look of suppressed resentment, rose and left the room.

She and Mildred had been having one of those sisterly differences of opinion which occasionally occurred, and which sometimes caused Alice to wonder, if her wishes had been fulfilled, if she had had a sister, whether she would have been the comfort and consolation she imagined.

These sisterly differences almost always ended in Mildred's being victorious, her superior quickness in the way of words and a more enlarged vocabulary, were cal-

culated to put to silence one who was infinitely slower than herself. And then Mildred could provoke her adversary and irritate her beyond endurance, and retain a very fair command of her own temper all the time.

The dispute this evening arose in consequence of Mildred's goodnature in asserting her views upon the subject of Mr. Saunderson's perfect indifference to Mary.

Mary, who thought herself an object of some interest, resented this, and drove Mildred to confess in a very irritating manner what she had done the day before.

This was a stroke for which Mary was totally unprepared, and even Mildred's utter thoughtlessness and carelessness of her sister's feelings was checked when she saw how much more keenly she felt it than she expected.

Sir Luke called Mildred to come and speak to him, and so she was obliged to leave the piano where she was humming a

mild attempt at a song, to cover her consciousness of that *something* impending which she knew well she deserved, and which, though seldom bestowed, was felt even by her frivolous nature when her father's easy temper was really roused.

She fluttered up to him and began lavishing endearments upon him, and calling him every pet name she could think of at the moment. But her father was in no humour to be trifled with, and shaking her off, desired her to sit down and be sensible, if that was possible; he wished to speak to her seriously.

Mildred sat down in her prettiest attitude, and clasped her hands together loosely, with an air of patient expectation.

"It is my belief, Mildred," said her father, sternly, "that you know more of this day's transactions than any one else."

"This day's transactions!" she exclaimed; "what transactions?"

Sir Luke was (it must be confessed) rather in a difficulty. He wanted to find out how much Mildred knew without committing himself, and of course he wished to spare his friend, and the two wishes seemed difficult to make compatible one with the other.

"You know best," said Sir Luke, "what hand you have had in all this!"

"In all what?" asked Mildred, in her prettiest and most innocent manner.

"Did you lead Mr. Saunderson to believe that Alice cared for him?" asked her father, finding that he gained nothing by diplomacy, in which he certainly never shone.

"It is so difficult to know what leads men to belief of any kind," answered his daughter, musingly.

"Was it owing to your representations that Mr. Saunderson proposed to Alice?" asked her father, waxing impatient.

"Then he did propose!" she exclaimed, clapping her hands. "Well done, Mr. Saunderson!

"He only did so on the strength of encouragement you must have given him," said Sir Luke, thoroughly angry.

"I cannot see what I have done wrong," she said, allowing tears to stand in her eyes, and looking as like a chidden child as possible.

"You cannot see what you have done wrong!" exclaimed her father. "Leading a man who is the last man in the world to act rashly, or to think too highly of himself, to come forward, knowing as you must have known, that he would only be refused; do you see nothing wrong in that?"

"Refused!" exclaimed Mildred, in a voice of the most perfect astonishment. "Did Alice refuse him?" And she opened her pretty blue eyes wide, with a look of the most anxious surprise and incredulity.

Sir Luke was silent. Mildred expres-

sively shrugged her shoulders, and said, slowly, "What a very odd girl she is! I certainly cannot understand her."

"I don't find it difficult to understand her," said her father, shortly. He was sorely perplexed. Mildred's acting was perfect; nothing was forgotten. Her movements were always graceful, and the surprise which was allowed to remain on her countenance, till by degrees a look of regret replaced it, would have made the fortune of many a professional actress. Gradually the large tears gathered and fell slowly, dropping with an ostentatious sound on a book in her lap.

Sir Luke was very uncomfortable. Mildred was a great deal too clever to use this way of softening him often; it was only on what she considered grand occasions that *les grandes eaux* were allowed to enhance the effect she wished to produce; and when she cried in this way it did not disturb her circulation, or make her nose assume an

unbecoming tinge, as is the case where crying comes by nature, and is not, as in her case, an acquired accomplishment.

"I did speak to Mr. Saunderson," she said, quietly, "or rather, he spoke to me. He said something which showed me how fond he was of Alice; and as I honestly wished to help on a man who, as you say, is so worthy of one's best feelings, knowing him to be so shy, I did let him know that——there was nothing between Alice and Mr. Champneys; that she thought Cecil was very young. But," she continued, turning to her father with a look in which wounded susceptibility struggled apparently with reproach, "I never imagined I was wrong. Alice, I always imagined, liked Mr. Saunderson beyond everything. She always talks of his powers, and his talents, and enlarged sphere of usefulness; so it was quite natural to believe she liked him. If you knew all ——" And here she paused, and covered her eyes with her handkerchief.

"You must allow, papa," she said, in a moderate and calm manner, "that Alice is rather puzzling in her manner. Now, Cecil, one never knows if she likes him or not; and, to this moment, I cannot say if he likes her in—any particular way. He fires up so at everything connected with her."

"Make yourself easy on that head," said Sir Luke, who was no match for Mildred; "Cecil, I have reason to believe——" And here he checked himself, and added, "I know, at all events, that he does like her particularly."

"Does he indeed ?" said Mildred. "Well, if he does, why on earth does he not propose to her ? But I have reasons for thinking——" And she assumed a look of satisfaction that gave a fresh subject for alarm to her father.

"For Heaven's sake, Mildred!" he exclaimed, hastily, "do not go and imagine

that Cecil cares for you. Nothing could lead to more wretchedness."

"Why?" asked Mildred, again affecting surprise.

"I think—I think it best at once to tell you," said Sir Luke, fairly beyond himself, "that Cecil is, and has been for a very long time, completely devoted to Alice, and that he did propose to her."

"Ah!" said Mildred, composedly. "Now, papa."

"Well, *what?*" asked the unfortunate Sir Luke, who was angry with himself, finding he was so completely foiled by his daughter.

"I was only going to remark," she said, in a very quiet voice, "that this makes two proposals she has received; and I do *not* think Cecil Champneys would have gone so far without that encouragement which, in the case of Mr. Saunderson, you seem to attribute so entirely to me."

Sir Luke started. This certainly was a new view of the question to him, and Mildred's shot had a very telling effect.

"I always think," continued Mildred, in a tone of good-natured candour, "that that very frank manner—a sort of way which I know you admire in common with most other people—is a little apt to mislead. Without either father or mother to serve as any guide or guard, one feels that a little reserve——. But I am perhaps unjust to her, especially at this moment, when——" and here her voice actually trembled, "when, for the very first time in my life, she has been the means of bringing me under your grave displeasure." And rising, she buried her face in Sir Luke's shoulder, and sobbed audibly.

What could Sir Luke do? He patted her on the back, told her not to cry, and felt particularly uncomfortable and quite in the wrong; and Mildred, still holding

her handkerchief up to her eyes, went slowly out of the room, and to her bedroom, with a feeling of unmingled satisfaction at what she could not but feel had been a test of her powers, and a success of no ordinary nature.

CHAPTER XXIX.

COMPLICATIONS END.

The next morning found Cecil Champneys making those arrangements, and completing that business, which had been the ostensible reason of his arrival at Haughton, and which, with that hatred of things distasteful or painful to him, that belonged to Sir Luke's character, he had postponed from day to day.

There was a natural pang when he contrasted his son with his probable heir. Cecil, square shouldered, with a massive chest and an upright figure, the clear quick look of the eyes, and the well-cut mouth, telling of a fearlessness and spirit that is the result of perfect health, and a total absence of all care.

Edward—sickly, languid, and deformed, with nerveless hands, and a mouth surrounded with peevish lines speaking of constant suffering and great depression, of almost childish weakness and helplessness.

Cecil always felt for him; and this morning, when his doubts about Alice's affection were at a minimum point, when life presented itself in colours of greater than usual brilliancy, he was full of sorrow for the cousin who had never shown either jealousy or dislike, and who "appreciated" Alice so much.

It is a little doubtful whether, in cases like that of Edward Haughton, the philosophy about other people deserves all the credit it obtains. In extreme illness, all worldly things naturally lose the value we put upon them when in health, and indifference is so often the consequence of mere physical depression, that it makes one doubtful of the truth of the calm resignation which is so often quoted by the sur-

rounding persons as proof of a mind almost heavenly. The great proof of a mind really elevated by any trial, is when you see it rise superior to suffering, whether bodily or mental, and taking a real sympathetic interest in the numberless crosses of those from whom its suffering has so far removed it, not taking for granted that it has acquired a right to dogmatize or overwhelm with good advice, but feeling with, and thinking of others.

Cecil had so much tact, and so much feeling, that the ice once broken, Sir Luke felt the relief of having entered into the question at last. His embarrassments had prevented his making many arrangements for the benefit of his daughters which he was most anxious to make; and Edward's life was so evidently drawing to a close, that much must depend upon Cecil's will and Cecil's wish. Cecil was generously anxious that no possible difference should be made; they were to be placed in the

position of his sisters. One gentle but firm denial he gave to the proposed arrangement. So long as Edward lived (supposing he survived Sir Luke), Haughton would be their home; and their father had conceived that it was only natural they should continue living there. To his sanguine mind, Cecil's marriage to Alice was a settled thing; and his being unmarried was the only reason he could see for a change. But Cecil at once chased away this notion, and Sir Luke learnt more of the mischief which Mildred must have made, when he found the elaborate preparations his heir was only too anxious to complete, to avoid the possibility of her ever requiring a home at Haughton.

After going through everything that was required of him, and placing the future upon a firm and distinct footing, Cecil left for London.

Arrived there, he lost no time in making his way to Lady Cecil's house. When at a

distance from Alice he had imagined nothing could be so easy as to explain everything to her, and he dwelt upon all he had heard that was favourable to his hopes, till he began to feel as if he had acted a very foolish part, and suffered very slight shadows to assume an exaggerated importance; but his first impression when, as a relative, he was shown into poor Lady Cecil's drawing-room, upset all the comfortable arguments he had indulged in upon his way, for Alice was not alone, she was sitting by a lady whom Cecil knew, but not intimately, the Duchess of Branlingham.

The first part of the little programme that he had conjured up vanished as a matter of course; instead of the impassioned "Alice!" by which he had hoped to convey such a multitude of regrets, hopes, and fears—instead of rushing into that explanation which would make everything right—he had to come forward with that proper amount of indifference and coolness which

it behoved a young Englishman to show to a young English lady; and instead of that aërial flight, founded upon the downfall of poor Mr. Saunderson, he had to listen with as much interest as befitted him to the various opinions and the contradictory fiats issued by the different medical men who "consulted" upon Lady Cecil's case.

The room was so subdued in light that poor Cecil could not even make out whether Alice was or was not pleased by his arrival. He had a respect for the duchess at ordinary times, and looked upon her as being exactly his ideal for the position she held. He had admired her amusing way of saying things; now he became heretical in his opinions; and when a quarter of an hour had elapsed, and she still sat there, entering into a sort of *sotto voce* conversation with his beloved, he voted her prosy in the extreme, and a great bore; nor did her smile soften him when she apologized carelessly for monopolizing Alice, and told him

they did not intend to make a stranger of him.

When she did leave, Cecil first grudged her the embrace which Alice bestowed upon her, and still more the necessity that existed for his going downstairs with her. He left her in as much haste as decency would permit, and tore upstairs to find that in the meantime Alice had vanished.

A message from Lady Cecil interfered with those feelings of indignation that he was indulging in; she wished to see him, and Cecil obeyed her summons with an unreasonable feeling of irritation. Was he *never* to come to an understanding with Alice?

He was terribly shocked when he saw Lady Cecil; he did not know that the great alteration he recognised was helped in a great degree by the absence of all those "aids," by the means of which she had to the last preserved a relic of the beauty of former days.

Lady Cecil, when he had last seen her, was sprightly and well dressed; bands of silvery hair lay smoothly on her forehead, and gave dignity and a softened look to her well-cut feature.

This Lady Cecil was toothless and wigless; the most unbecoming frills of her nightcap shaded the upper part of her face, where time had dealt more leniently than usual, and showed to sorrowful disadvantage the wrinkles and hard sharp lines around the mouth.

He remained beside her for nearly an hour; her articulation was difficult, and she had, she said, so much to say.

When he returned to the drawing-room Alice was there. His interview with Lady Cecil had impressed him very sadly, and the reaction of his sanguine expectations of the morning oppressed him.

He was, however, determined that this opportunity should not be lost; and before Alice was well aware of his intention, he

plunged into the history of the last few weeks. He told her of his jealousy—of his fears, and confessed his weakness in allowing Mildred to influence him. Like most other declarations, nothing could have been more humble than his own estimation of himself, according to his own account. He abased himself, and wondered if anything so perfect as she was could be brought to care for him, &c. &c.

Alice was a little startled at first. Why, if his feelings had been of this breadth and depth, had he missed the thousand and one opportunities he had had, and now selected a time when so many things claimed her attention? But as the two grew more confidential, and confessed their feelings to each other, they compared notes, and were surprised beyond measure at the number of times Mildred's talents for misrepresentation had been brought to bear upon them both.

CHAPTER XXX.

WHICH BRINGS THINGS TO AN END.

When Cecil's letter announcing his engagement reached Haughton, no one was taken by surprise except Lady Haughton.

She could not understand it. "There was I, my dear," she said to Sir Luke, "entering into a discussion about her character and everything, and she going to be his wife; and I told him so many things. I think he did not listen very attentively, which is a very good thing, as it happens. And now I cannot account for her crying; and besides, there is the German lover."

"The German *who*," inquired her husband, laughing very much in the tone of incredulity used by Cecil when a similar statement was made to him.

"Lover," said her ladyship, with a very puzzled face; "that man whom Lischen referred to mysteriously once. Oh! but I forgot you do not know he was in Germany when her father died, and it was him I meant when I asked Alice about her crying and all that, and you said I had hurt her feelings."

Sir Luke laughed as he had rarely done lately, and his wife was extremely indignant.

"Why, my dear," he said, "that man was Cecil himself."

Lady Haughton sat completely stupefied. She could not comprehend it. Cecil! the idea was too much for her hazy brain, and after a protracted silence she exclaimed, "Then I was talking to Cecil about himself all the time!"

"Exactly," said Sir Luke.

"Well then, my dear, it was very deceitful of him not to tell me so; why I may have abused him to himself, and very likely

I said that I considered *him* an adventurer. I shall have to write and apologize, and tell him I am very sorry, but that I thought, in short that I thought he was somebody else. But," she continued, "I was right in one thing, for there was a *he* exactly as I said, only Cecil turns out to be the one. And cheered by the reflection of having at least been right in one particular, Lady Haughton was considerably pleased, and had plenty to occupy her thinking powers.

Mildred was graciously pleased to write her congratulations to Alice, and as her letter was a characteristic one, it had better appear.

"DEAREST ALICE,—I congratulate you most sincerely on the happy termination of all your anxieties; my congratulations are all the warmer that I feel I have helped to bring it all to a satisfactory conclusion. Nothing like a little jealousy to stimulate a lukewarm or hesitating lover; and know-

ing how deeply your affections were engaged, I did not hesitate to come to the rescue. Tell Cecil, with my kind love, that the past will be as a sealed book, and I trust he may be happy. I will never betray or repeat his impressions so frankly conveyed to me under different circumstances."

Alice was too happy not to be generous, and she never even showed this friendly epistle to Cecil. Indeed, Mildred so completely and effectually took up the position of having helped, that she imposed upon a good many people.

Herr Knoplauch was too old to undertake so long a journey, so he said, but the marriage was enlivened by the presence of his wife; the good Hofrath, to the last moment of his life, imagined that the wedding was due in a great measure to that effort he had made nearly three years before to bring Cecil Champneys to a sense of what was ex-

pected from him. Lady Cecil's death was one reason for delaying the wedding, and Edward Haughton's a good excuse for having it very quiet.

Again the bells rang out at Eppington, but under different circumstances, and Madame Knoplauch could not but contrast this wedding with the last she had witnessed at Haughton; and she felt that if Bertha could be present in the spirit, that spirit would rejoice at the fair future opening to her daughter.

THE END.

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